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COMICS INTERVIEW

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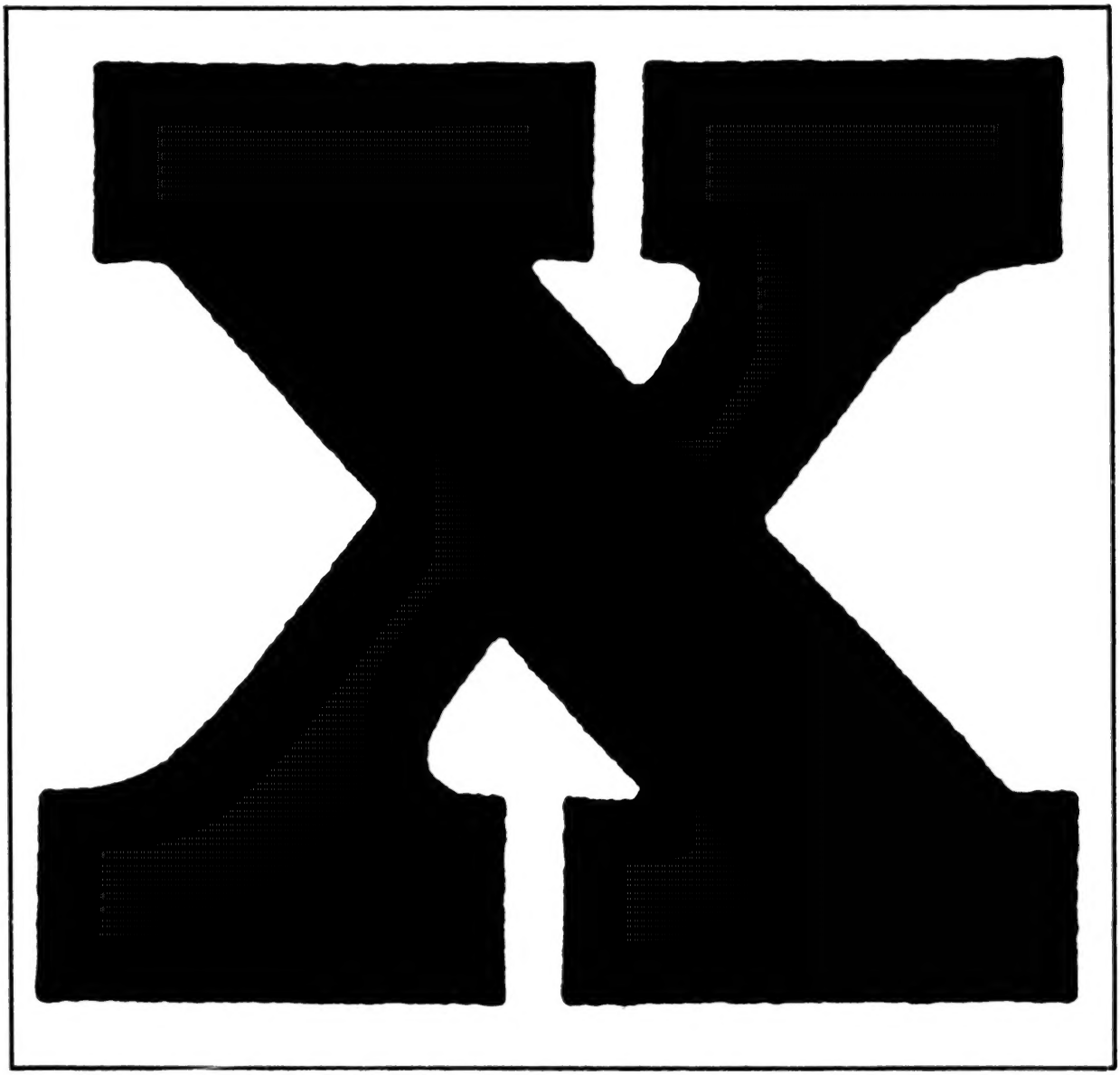

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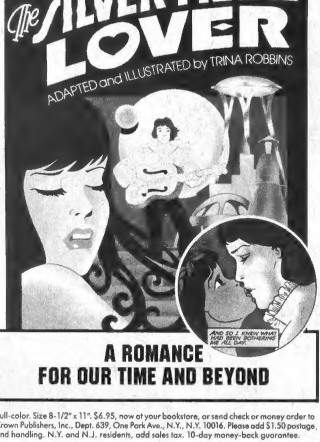

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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS INTERVIEW

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"X-FACTOR is not part of the mutant take-over of the comic-book world."

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X-FACTOR

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Jackson Guice
Born: 27 June 1961—Chattanooga, TN
Current Residence: Asheville, NC
Occupation: Artist
Credits: SOUTHERN KNIGHTS, MICRONAUTS, SWORDS OF THE SWASHBUCKLERS, X-FACTOR and others
Favorite Artist: Hal Foster
Favorite Penpoint: Hunt #102
Favorite Food: Sashimi

I first heard about Jackson Guice because of his work on MICRONAUTS, but I can't say that I really paid too much attention to him then. He was, literally, one of the crowd. It wasn't until I saw SWORDS OF THE SWASHBUCKLERS that I realized that here was an artist who was clearly distinguishing himself, who could become a major force in the industry. The following interview, however, resulted from Jackson's work on X-FACTOR. I did a marathon series of articles on that title for MARVEL AGE magazine, but afterwards discovered that I hadn't gotten the full story. So, with Steve Saffel's help I eventually managed to track Jackson down at his North Carolina home and talked with him about several subjects — including how to draw with a broken arm...

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"I'd like to do with X-FACTOR what Jack Kirby did with the FANTASTIC FOUR."

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DWIGHT JON ZIMMERMAN: *How did X-FACTOR come about?*

JACKSON GUICE: Well, X-FACTOR really came about in a kind of a strange fashion. It was an idea that **Bob Layton** and I pitched to **Jim Shooter** about putting together a title — but neither one of us was really volunteering to work on it. It was just an idea that sparked in our heads. We were staying at Jim's place in New York one weekend and we were looking through the make-readies of that month's issues from Marvel — Jim was away — and we were discussing the various titles and everything. DEFENDERS and X-MEN were two of the titles. We looked at them and got to talking about here were these great old X-MEN characters, the original X-Men, and — not to belittle the work anyone was doing on DEFENDERS — but we really felt like they should be in a title of their own. We both had an extreme fondness for the original X-Men.

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"Layton and I loved the original X-MEN."

DWIGHT: *You followed them when you were . . .*

JACKSON: Yeah, yeah — very religiously as a matter of fact. And Jim came back and we said, "Jim, *this* is what you ought to do . . ." Telling the Editor-In-Chief what to do. *(Laughter.)* "You take these original X-Men and you put them together in a new book; and you go back to the original premise of the first run of X-MEN — which was when Professor X said that the purpose of the team and the school and everything was

LASS, I DON'T KNOW, BUT AS SOON AS I GET BACK HOME, I BLOODY WELL INTEND T'FIND OUT!
PULL FOR THE STARSHADOW, SWASHBUCKLERS! WE SET SAIL FOR HAVEN!
THOUGH IN A STATE OF SHOCK, STUNNED BY ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED TO HER, CONNO DRAKE ACCOMPANIES THE CAPTAIN AND HER CREW BACK TO THE STARS. HER HOME PLANET HAS BEEN SAVED, BUT CONNO SUSPECTS THAT ONLY WITH THE HELP OF THESE SWASHBUCKLERS WILL SHE EVER BE ABLE TO RESCUE HER PARENTS...AND SOLVE THE MYSTERY OF HER RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ALIEN WOMAN NAMED RAADER.
TO BE CONTINUED

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"Carlin said, 'We'll call it X-FACTOR.'"

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to seek out and find mutants and help them cope, to eliminate mutant threats, to basically be the bridge between mutantkind and humanity." And we said, "These guys are like the oldest mutants walking around, as far as trained mutants, in the Marvel Universe. They've got the most experience. They've been dealing with this kind of thing for years in comparison to most of the other mutants. Take this experience and have 'em put it to good use." At the time Bob and I were planning to work on HERCULES and...

DWIGHT: *A third series?*

JACKSON: Yeah, but this was supposed to be a regular series. So we weren't really thinking about the fact that we were pitching this book for ourselves. We were just thinking, "Here's an idea," you know? "Do with it as you wish." And Jim looked at us and said, "Well, when do you want to start?" And we sort of looked at each other and it was the first time it really dawned on us that, you know, we could do this. And the more we talked about it the more excited we got about it, and it went from there. We talked to **Mike Carlin**, who was originally our choice as editor for HERCULES, and he agreed to be editor for X-FACTOR. As a matter of fact he came up with the name. He went to lunch and came back and said, "We'll call it X-FACTOR."

DWIGHT: *Okay. How do you feel your art is different with X-FACTOR compared to, like, what you've done with* SWORDS OF THE SWASHBUCKLERS *and other stuff?*

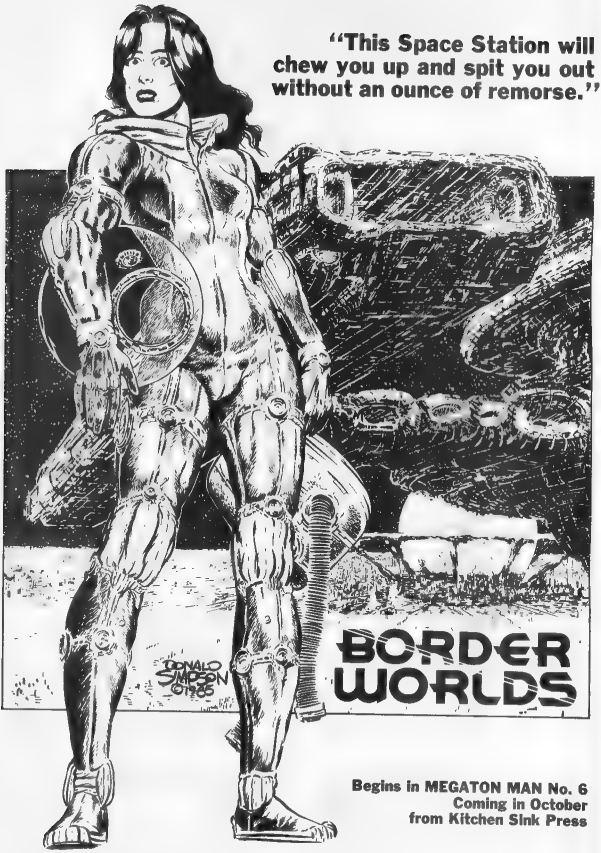
JACKSON: Well, this is the first time in working for three years at Marvel that I've done a regular superhero book. Strangely enough, in a field that, you know, is proliferated with superhero books I've always managed to work on things like MICRONAUTS and SWORDS OF THE SWASHBUCCKLERS and COYOTE. I've done a couple of one-shot things, like my AVENGERS ANNUAL, but I've never worked on a regular superhero book — which was what I grew up on. I've always wanted to do 'em, but this is the first time for me to really get to go back and do the stuff that I remember from my childhood, from what caught my imagination. So it's a big step, I think, forward. With SWASHBUCKLERS in particular I was looking for a different style to begin with. I was going for an old style

illustration type of thing, like **Hal Foster** — so I was really trying not to do a superhero look to begin with.

DWIGHT: *That's kind of strange when you mention Hal Foster as being the inspiration for your* SWASHBUCKLERS *since certain things in there reminded me of N. C. Wyeth and a couple of...*

JACKSON: Yeah, yeah — **Howard Pyle**. When I sat down to do SWASHBUCKLERS I wanted to go toward that direction. I gathered as much material as I could on it. I read all the pirate books that I could get my hands on, and anything that had old pirate illustrations. I read books on just the ships. MYSTERIOUS ISLAND. TREASURE ISLAND. ROBINSON CRUSOE. That was really the fire for SWASHBUCKLERS. That was where I wanted to go with it.

DWIGHT: *Did you have any problems reconciling the fact that you have giant sailing ships, you know, cruising through space?*



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"I'm recycling all my childhood memories."

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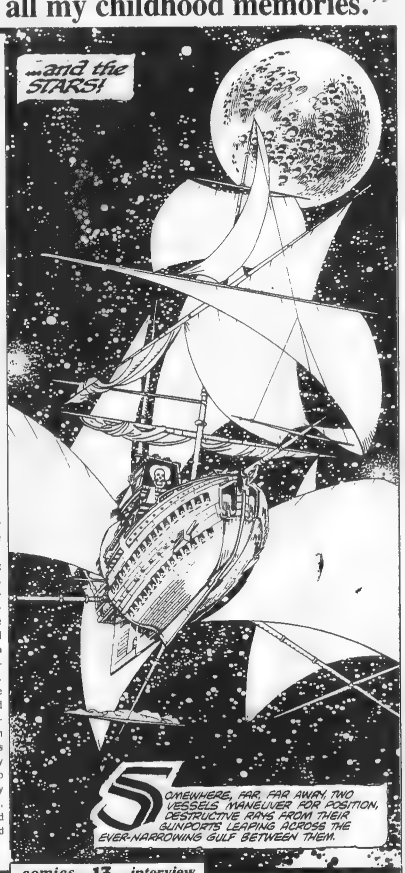
JACKSON: Not really. My approach to it was this is a funny comic book and that I really just wanted to, for my part of it, to embody the word "swashbucklers." Okay, this is a fantasy comic book — this is the situation. These are the elements. This is the craft they use. Let's go do a good story and let's have fun with it. And visually the pirate ships worked for me. I tried doing some designs with more of a BATTLESTAR GALACTICA/BLADERUNNER/STAR WARS feel. You know, looking back on a lot of the other pirates-in-space type of stories that have been done over the years in comic books, most of them have gone that route. That never really quite worked for me. My intention was basically to do a pirate comic that happened to be set in space. I wanted to do it visually to the point, if not from the fact, that if you set it in water it could have been a story about 16th Century pirates.

DWIGHT: *Okay. Well, it being an Epic comic rather than a regular Marvel comic, did that allow you a little bit more room for a broader interpretation?*

JACKSON: I think so — but I don't really think it necessarily had to be Epic. I think that it could have been done at Marvel, but it was more readily accepted by the Epic audience because the titles are a little bit more experimental.

DWIGHT: *Well, how do you feel that you were being experimental? The themes in SWORDS OF THE SWASHBUCKLERS are not really, like, heavy themes. It's pretty much an action adventure.*

JACKSON: Well, no. What I was saying is I think that the Epic audience in general, when you're dealing with titles like MOONSHADOW and TIME-SPIRITS, they're a little more open-minded. It doesn't have to be so readily explained. My first primary goal when I sit down with a comic is to have fun and, while I'm having fun doing it, hopefully to entertain the people who are reading it. And the part that it was capturing with me — and I was talking this over with several people who commented on it — was that certain age that goes from about 11 to 14 when you first discover **Jules Verne, Robert Louis Stevenson, Errol Flynn** movies. Mostly you're discussing young boys here. They go through this discovery of this whole fantasy world, this whole pirate realm, this whole, you know, other swashbuckling era filled with costumes and flash and plunder and everything. That's where we were going.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I've never really worried too much about doing something that's never been done in comic books before, only because after 60-odd years of it I've got to wonder if maybe there's a reason it's never been done in comic books before. Certain things don't really translate well. I think you have to be true to the medium. You're dealing with a comic book. If you want to get very, very heavy into this very intense characterization . . . if you're wanting to do WAR AND PEACE you can do it better as a novel, the way it was done. I don't think WAR AND PEACE would make a very good comic book. And in turn there are certain things that work much better as a film simply because they would be a little too slow paced, a little too drawn out to do in a comic-book format. When I was working with this I thought it worked real well.

DWIGHT: *You thought what worked real well?*

JACKSON: What we did in SWASHBUCKLERS. I thought the elements that were there were a nice blend of those things that I remembered from my own experiences when I was 12 and 14 and discovering this kind of material. The trips to the library to read MYSTERIOUS ISLAND and books on **Captain Kidd** and **Blackbeard** and things like that, that's what we carried off in the book to a degree. If I'd stayed on the book I was hoping that we would continue in that direction, but I'm leaving with issue #4.

DWIGHT: *Why did you decide to leave it? Was it because of your commitment to X-FACTOR?*

JACKSON: That was a large part of it. I found that suddenly I was committed to X-FACTOR and that I was not being able to give SWASHBUCKLERS as much time as it deserved. The book began to gradually get behind schedule. In an effort to get it out on time the artwork began to look a little rushed.

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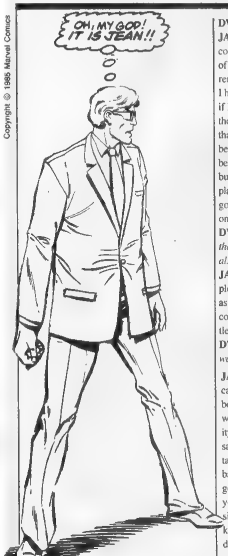

and I wasn't being quite fair to the other people involved in the book in terms of, you know, I was giving them half a product. If I cannot hold up my end than I really have no business being there — and so we talked it over and worked everything out and I'm going off to have fun doing this *other* part of my childhood. I'm recycling all of my childhood memories.

DWIGHT: *Let's get into your interpretation of the X-FACTOR characters, then. What is your major influence, stylistically?*

JACKSON: Stylistically? I think my major influence is not being influenced stylistically. I'm drawing them from my memory more than anything else. I've sort of resisted going back through and re-reading all of those books.

DWIGHT: *Oh? You haven't done research?*

JACKSON: Only when it's necessary for a costume or a particular event. My memory of those titles is so sharp, as far as what I remember, as far as the original thing that I had reading those books, that I'm afraid that if I went back and read them over again that there would be some kind of contradiction, that they would not be as good as I remember because my values have changed from being 12-years-old to now and working in the business and all. I'm just basically trying to play off what I remember from them and just go from that. I think the bigger influence is on who the characters are.

DWIGHT: *Were you intimidated at all by the fact that you have the New X-Men and also the New Mutants running around?*

JACKSON: Not really. No. I think there's plenty of room. I really don't think of this as part of, like, this mutant take-over of the comic-book world — where every other title seems to be a mutant book.

DWIGHT: *Nonetheless, it does seem that way.*

JACKSON: Yeah. Yeah. But I think basically what it boils down to is that the mutant books under **Chris Claremont** are extremely well done. I think that explains the popularity. You might get a certain percentage of sales because it's "a mutant book" and mutants are hot right now, but I think it goes back to basically the difference between a good comic and a bad comic. If you want your readers to keep coming back then they simply have to enjoy it. I don't think they'll keep coming back simply because it's a book dealing with mutants.

DWIGHT: *You're hedging your bets pretty good by bringing back Jean Grey.*

JACKSON: Yeah Well, strangely enough that was not in the original idea when Bob and I presented the series. That was brought to us and it was put in simply because it worked as such a good story.

DWIGHT: *I was talking with Bob Layton who said that he had actually done up a completely different story when John Byrne came in with this idea.*

JACKSON: Yeah. We had had the first five or six stories worked out already, verbally plotted, when John and **Roger Stern** approached Jim together with this idea, and then we were called in because suddenly it was like if there was anyplace they were going to have this event it was gonna be in X-FACTOR. But other than once it was presented to us and working it into the storyline, we really had no part of bringing that character back.

DWIGHT: *Surely there must have been the realization that this might be interpreted as a cheap shot? How did you guys figure out how to make this thing flow smoothly and actually have some meaning beyond a "hey, guys, guess who we're bringing back" sort of thing?*

JACKSON: Well, I think it goes back to the fact that we both really like the characters. The book really is getting the same amount of attention and work from us, one way or the other, as our feeling for it. I think the title would probably have worked just as well without the character, and the fact that that particular character is back now doesn't mean she is going to be played up any moreso that the other characters. X-FACTOR's success or failure will depend on the quality of the work. I don't think that you'd be able to ride on the fact of a character's return.

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SON--LOOK! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! WE'RE HERE TO--

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DWIGHT: *Do you and Bob plot the stories out together?*

JACKSON: Yeah. This is the first really true collaborative team that I've worked on since I got into comic books. As far as the stories go no one sits down and works up the general direction of the plot. What Bob and I tend to do is get together and spend, like, an intense week simply brainstorming the characters themselves — certain elements about the characters and what makes them tick. We just start tossing ideas back and forth. We don't sit down and say, "Okay, and then in issue #5 we'll do this to this character." It's little random things. I will simply say things like, "Do you remember back in #63 what happened and everything and they never touched on it again?" Bob will remember and I'll say, "That always intrigued me," and we'll look at it. Or we might simply get together and argue about the type of clothes these characters would wear. Anything and everything dealing with the characters is just tossed back and forth. Usually we're quite in agreement. I find that we both tend to think very closely on the same lines as far as the characters are concerned.

And then after we've done like a week of this we sit down and start figuring out what progression of order we can put these events in. We have things that we've tossed back and forth that probably will not be seen until the end of the second year. That doesn't mean that we're saving them in reserve in case something fails. It's simply that it will not work that early on. We have so many things going on that to throw in these other things would be simply to lose them in the shuffle. It would just be extra padding. We haven't decided, like, in issue #19 this and this will happen. It's just out there and sooner or later we're working to this point and that point. We find that we have far more ideas than we have room in each issue to do.

And it doesn't end with just the plotting because then there's the fact that Bob's also an artist. He'll suggest ways to handle certain scenes. I'll do it. If he sees something that doesn't quite work right, or an element that I've missed, he'll bring it back to me and mention it. If I agree with it we'll rework it. If I disagree with it we'll talk it out. We'll decide which is the best way to go with it. X-FACTOR is the first book that I've felt was a 24-hour-a-day job — as far as understanding the characters and things. It's not simply something to sit down and say that I have to turn out *x* number of pages today. I'm constantly finding little things in magazines and newspapers, articles and stuff that spark future storylines. I'll just call Bob up and mention it to him and we'll start rambling about it and who knows — six issues down the line it'll appear.

DWIGHT: *Has Bob visited you down in Asheville?*

JACKSON: Yeah. We do quite a bit of commuting back and forth right now as far as dealing with the book. It's much more beyond the regular type thing. Also, Mike **Higgins** and Mike **Carlin** are wonderful about it in that they're constantly pitching ideas at us. They're terrific about finding the holes that we have in our ideas, because we tend to get so close to it that sometimes there *are* holes. There are things that go somewhere and then stop and don't really quite connect, and both Mikes are very good about saying, "Whoa! I know you wanta rush to get to this part, but you touched on this thing and you didn't quite pull it off. Why don't you try this and this and this?" It really is like sitting down and living and breathing and eating this comic book in order to put it together.

DWIGHT: *What do you hope to establish with X-FACTOR?*

JACKSON: Strangely enough **Paul Smith** asked me the same thing this past weekend. I told him that I would like to do with X-FACTOR what **Jack Kirby** did with his run on FF. At times I wish I'd set a much easier goal. *(Laughter.)* If I'd been given my choice of characters to draw, if Jim had simply said, "Go do something, whatever you want," the original X-Men would probably have been at one of the top-three positions.

DWIGHT: *Okay. I have a rather off-the-wall question to throw at you. Do you think you are a good comic book artist?*

JACKSON: *(Pause.)* I think I'm a solid storyteller. I think I have quite a bit more to learn. As soon as you feel that you don't have anything more to learn then you're in *big* trouble.

"Steve Kent, the inker of SOUTHERN

DWIGHT: *What, then, do you think are your weaknesses?*

JACKSON: Oh, Geez! This interview's gonna be real long then. *(Laughter.)* I think I have weaknesses in every area. I think that there are incredible amounts of improvement to continue to be done. The biggest thing is to keep a very open mind and listen and watch other people's reactions to what you do because they're constantly seeing things that you really did not think about. I think my one major fault — and I'm currently working on it right now — is that I tend to lose a little bit of power and drama in the drawings while working at getting the anatomy right. I used to feel that I was a terrible anatomy artist, and so I concentrated quite heavily on it over the past year or so, trying to get better. In the process I started losing the power and the drama in each panel.

DWIGHT: *Well, if you examine Jack Kirby, for example, his anatomy is really skewed, but the way he puts everything together really works*

JACKSON: Exactly. That was pointed out to me. That was not something that I was seeing. I was too busy sitting in the corner chuckling to myself and going, "Yeah, that hand really looks good," you know — and it was commented upon to me. "You know, this could have been a little bit more powerful here. This could have been a little bit more dramatic right here." After a couple of comments like that I looked at it and said, *"WHOOOPS!* I'm sleeping in another area now." So now I gotta turn around and work on that. It's a contnuing learning process. As long as you're doing it you should keep trying to improve.

DWIGHT: *You've been doing this type of stuff for quite some time and I would be horribly remiss — to say nothing about upsetting DAK — if I didn't bring up SOUTHERN KNIGHTS.* (Laughter.) *Is that how you really got started into comics?*

JACKSON: I was doing some fanzine work — I was employed in the design department doing patches and emblems — but I really had not done any comic-book work in over a year. I'd simply been too busy with the job. I was drawing eight or nine hours a day. I would come home tired and worn out, and I'd pretty much given up on getting into comic books. I'd tried a couple of times.

DWIGHT: *Who did you hit up?*

JACKSON: Well, mostly I had shown some samples to various people at conventions and things and sent a couple of things off to a couple of the companies, and the response always tended to run towards, "This shows a lot of promise. Keep working on it." Enough of that and you hit that brick wall. Do you move to New York and sleep on park benches and keep working on the off chance of getting in, or do you keep designing patches and emblems? It is an art field. I'd compromised myself. Then — I'm not quite sure about this — I believe **Henry Vogel** and **David Willis** saw some of my artwork in the fanzines. They tracked me down and gave me a call and said that they were interested in putting together a comic book and would I be interested in doing it? I thought about it for awhile and thought, you know, this would be a good idea. This was a chance to keep my hand in comic books and to continue to do the stuff that I enjoy. I'd pretty much decided it was going to be a hobby. It was gonna be something that I did, but I'd pretty much given up as far as hopes of getting into the professional comic-book world. So, I decided to do SOUTHERN KNIGHTS Then a number of things happened. About halfway through the first issue I broke my drawing arm, which was great. Then **Bill Mantlo**, who had seen some of my work, called me up and asked if I was interested in doing an issue of MICRONAUTS. Out of the blue I got this call from Marvel!

DWIGHT: *"Bill, I broke my arm..."*

JACKSON: I didn't mention that. *(Laughter.)* I finished SOUTHERN KNIGHTS #1 and drew my first MICRONAUTS with my arm in a cast. I had to stand up at the table to draw because of the way the cast bent — and I was still working overtime at the patch and emblem place. It was an interesting couple of months.

DWIGHT: *How long did that arm take to heal?*

JACKSON: About three weeks. The first issue of MICRONAUTS I had to do in about two weeks simply because the book was incredibly late at that point. I stayed on SOUTHERN KNIGHTS for another issue, but then I was getting more Marvel work and my heart really lay in doing the Marvel superheroes that I grew up with, so I took my leave from SOUTHERN KNIGHTS.

DWIGHT: *It's unfair in many respects to try and compare Marvel to SOUTHERN KNIGHTS — a big company with lots of money to a couple of guys getting together to — but...well...what do you think has been the great thing about SOUTHERN KNIGHTS that made it such a cult comic?*

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KNIGHTS, does my backgrounds on X-FACTOR."

JACKSON: For one thing, when you're doing something like that — you'll find this in particular Marvel books, too, such as **Simonson's** THOR, Walt simply loves the character and it shows — when you're simply doing something you want to do, something you love doing, the energy shines through. It goes back to what I tend to refer to as the 12-year-old magic When you're 12 and you're reading comics and loving them you'd pay Marvel or anybody for the *opportunity* to do 'em. You're willing to pay them to let you draw their pages. I also think that to a degree it is the fact that the title is not your standard Marvel or DC look-alike where they've got a radioactive mutant ninja something or other... *(Laughter.)* Let's get everything that's selling and put it together. Instead of that, SOUTHERN KNIGHTS has a well thought out concept and some very interesting characters. It's its own book.

DWIGHT: *Do you still read SOUTHERN KNIGHTS?*

JACKSON: I still follow it.

DWIGHT: *Who's your favorite character?*

JACKSON: My favorite character was Kristin, but that goes back to when I was drawing the book because I had so much fun drawing her in those little shorts which she no longer walks around in. *(Laughter.)* After that it would have to be Mark, the dragon character.

DWIGHT: *I always thought that was an interesting twist, having a dragon who could run around as a human.*

JACKSON: Yeah. Yeah. Here's an irony for you — **Steve Kent**, who inks the books, is my background man and is now doing backgrounds on X-FACTOR. More SOUTHERN KNIGHTS alumni continue to work at Marvel. Maybe we can become like a branch office or something. *(Laughter.)*

DWIGHT: *After doing SOUTHERN KNIGHTS and then going over to Marvel, did you find yourself having to relearn or unlearn things?*

JACKSON: Well, I certainly found myself learning things. Like I said, you can learn from everything You learn that this isn't the right way to do this. You learn that this is a better way to do this. Drawing is a very continuing learning process for me. I did find, though, that what I knew about storytelling at that time could maybe fill a pinhead, and I was sure that I had all the problems licked. I was sure that I had unlocked the secrets. The thing that I really appreciated, as far as working for Marvel, was that I was able to sit down with people like Bob and Jim and some of the others up there and have someone verbalize it to me. Rather than looking at it and saying that it's not quite right, they would sit down and say what the problem was. "You missed the establishing shot. This should have been a medium close-up because we needed this expression." You begin to understand it a little better.

DWIGHT: *Do you remember your first visit to the Bullpen?*

JACKSON: Strangely enough, the first visit to the Bullpen came a year-and-a-half after I'd been working for Marvel. I was already acquainted with quite a few people through conventions and over the phone. But the 12-year-old magic was there. It still has that same magic quality.

DWIGHT: *The fantasy wasn't destroyed by the reality?*

JACKSON: No Not in the least. I began to understand the business and production aspects of it, but by and large that magic is still there in the Bullpen. The people, for the most part, enjoy their jobs. They still are living off that 12-year-old magic that brought them there to begin with. This is what I wanted to do when I was 12 years old, and I'm finally getting the chance to do it. I'm having the time of my life.

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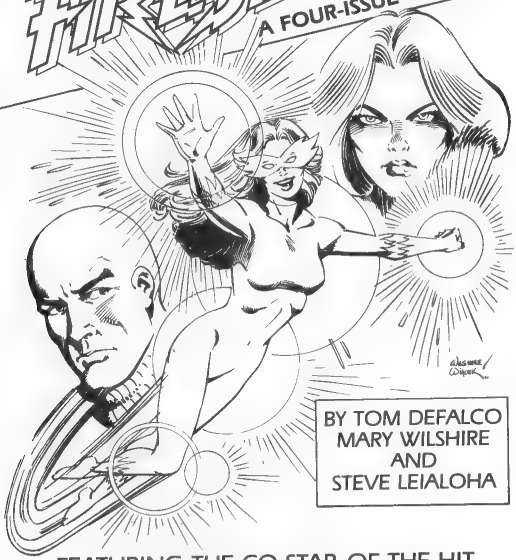

BY TOM DEFALCO
MARY WILSHIRE
AND
STEVE LEIALOHA

FEATURING THE CO-STAR OF THE HIT SATURDAY MORNING TV SERIES SPIDER-MAN AND HIS AMAZING FRIENDS!™

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"The magic is still there in the Bullpen."

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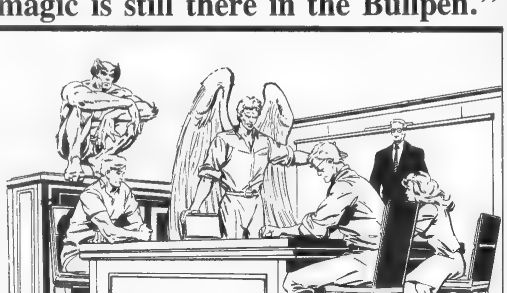


MIKE CARLIN says...

The frenetic pace of the comic-book industry has been recorded elsewhere, and it exemplified itself with the arrangements for this interview. Even though I know Mike Carlin and see him almost every time I go into the Marvel Bullpen, which is to say every day, we were so mutually busy that when the time came when we could both sit down for a brief chat about his current pet project, X-FACTOR, I was in Denver and he was in New York, so we had to talk by phone!

MIKE CARLIN: Basically, I don't listen to a lot of what the fan press says before a book comes out. I'm more interested in what the reactions are afterwards. Most of the rumors, you know, come from people that really aren't in touch with what's happening here, and they're basically wrong.

What I like about what I'm hearing, you know, is that most people aren't angry about the comic. They are looking forward to it, and I'm glad about that because this is something that I've wanted to do for a real long time. When I was a kid THE X-MEN was my favorite Marvel comic, and DAREDEVIL was a close second. I've wanted to get the original X-Men back together for centuries. **Bob Layton** was a fan of the original X-MEN, too, you know. He likes the characters and he's gonna do them justice.

I think X-FACTOR's greatest asset is that we have a history to cull adventures from. Also, the personalities are already established They were well-rounded characters before we got ahold of them, yet we've added a whole new aspect with their regrouping. That's gonna keep it fresh.

It will still have the personality stuff.

Every single one of them is going to have problems, just like real life. They might not all have problems on day one, but as the stories unfold, they are all going to have problems. Naturally, every issue won't be all five of them, but.. it's like the DYNASTY type of thing. One week, they'll focus on two characters more than the others, and a week after that they'll focus on some other characters — but they're all still major stars. There really won't be a lot of extraneous characters like in ROM where there are a million Spaceknights.

But we definitely wanna bring it back to kind of an old Marvel feel. A lot of big panels. Lots of exciting, novel locations. It's gonna kinda be like a James Bond comic. That's not to say spy comics — but it's going to have that feel for adventure.

The X-Men and the New Mutants are secret organizations, you know. One of them is actually a school, and the other one is just like, I guess, graduate school — and their work is very secret. X-Factor is going to be covert in a way, yet they're going to be what I'd call hiding in plain sight. They are going to be a very, very public organization. They're going to be advertised on television as a service for, you know, mutant-haters across the land.

I think everyone's going to be pleasantly surprised by X-FACTOR.

"My curse has always been versatility."

© 1948 Fawcett Pub

"I was the top-paid comic writer in the '40s."

Photo by Duane Quinn

WILLIAM WOOLFOLK

If you're looking for an entertaining novel to pass some time with, I can honestly recommend the work of William Woolfolk — or Bill, as he is known to his friends. Ever since the Fifties he's been turning out well-written books, from fictionalized biographies (MAGGIE and MY NAME IS MORGAN) to romance (WE TWO, THE BEAUTIFUL COUPLE) to studies of subtle corruption (HARD CORE) to horror (THE SENDAI).

Two other books of his you may be familiar with, if you were a fan back in the mid-Sixties, are BATMAN VS. THREE VILLAINS OF DOOM and BATMAN VS. THE FEARSOME FOURSOME.

You see, Bill Woolfolk used to write comics back in the Golden Age. Tons of them.

He wrote CAPTAIN MARVEL, SUPERMAN, THE SPIRIT, PLASTIC MAN, BATMAN, BLACKHAWK, DOLL MAN, CAPTAIN AMERICA, THE HUMAN TORCH, THE WIZARD — anything that Quality, or DC, or Timely, or Fawcett, or MLJ Comics produced was fair game for Bill Woolfolk. They all considered him one of their best scripters — and they were right.

Bill graduated from comic books into novels and TV, and became mainstay writer on the early Sixties television series, THE DEFENDERS, still regarded as one of the best programs of its time. He also got into publishing for a while (SPACE WORLD) and other ventures, all of which are touched on in this interview. Currently, he writes a column, "Wit and Wisdom," which appears in several newspapers.

But the main focus of this interview, of course, is Bill's career in Golden Age comics. I found him a more than charming and interesting interviewee, and I think you'll find the same in this conversation. Once again, a tip of the hat to Jim Steranko for helping set this one up.

And now, a few words with Woolfolk...

"I think that comics were the best test-

Bill scripted BLACKHAWK in the Forties and Fifties.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: William Woolfolk
Born: 25 June 1917
Residence: New Canaan, CT
Credits: Golden Age comics galore: THE SPIRIT, SUPERMAN, CAPTAIN MARVEL, PLASTIC MAN, THE HUMAN TORCH, BLACKHAWK, CAPTAIN AMERICA, ARCHIE, etc. TV: THE DEFENDERS. Books: THE BEAUTIFUL COUPLE, and many more.
Astrological Sign: Cancer. My wife, Joanna, is a Libra. She's also well-known, but as an astrologer. She writes a column for SELF magazine and also has a couple of books out of her own. Her latest, THE ONLY ASTROLOGY BOOK YOU'LL EVER NEED, was a choice of both the Literary Guild and Doubleday book clubs. All my various wives have been Libras. Cancer and Libra are supposed to go well together.

Progeny: I have a daughter, Donna Woolfolk Cross, who is also an author. Her name was Donna Catherine, but she decided to preserve the Woolfolk. She wrote a book called WORD ABUSE for which I wrote a screamingly funny introduction. *(Laughter.)* That got her on JOHNNY CARSON five times. That's a record for one single book.

BILL WOOLFOLK: I will not waste any of your valuable telephone time — here's my opinion about everything... *(Laughter.)*
LOU MOUGIN: *Well, that's a pretty good opinion.*
BILL: And now that you have that, good luck to you. I do get nervous with people on long distance. Every word has its weight in gold. Do you get nervous, too?
LOU: *Yeah, I do get nervous, when I'm talking to somebody for the first time, especially. The first thing I want to ask about is — in comic book terms — the origin of Bill Woolfolk. Steranko's HISTORY OF COMICS covers a lot of this stuff — I just wanted to fill in some details. You were born around Center Moriches?*
BILL: I stayed there until I was about the age of three months, at which time I found out where I was and I left.
LOU: *Ah, okay. That sounds like some of my fortunes. It says your family was moving around a lot and you spent a lot of time at Coney Island...*
BILL: My father was the manager of the Coney Island Theater, so I automatically spent a lot of time up there.
LOU: *So you came in a lot of contact with a lot of acting folk and such?*
BILL: My whole family was from the acting business.
LOU: *That throws me into mind of your novel MY NAME IS MORGAN. That was the thing based on the life of Mike Todd, right?*
BILL: Yes, it was.
LOU: *I think that was the first book of yours that I read.*
BILL: My family was in some ways famous, but in an era that preceded both stage, practically, and movies and stuff — the early 1900s. My aunt was Kitty Wolf, who in her day was a famous vaudvillian and introduced things like "Rings On Her Fingers and Bells On Her Toes."
LOU: *She sang that song first?*
BILL: She and Nita Panguay — I'm not sure which came first. This is all such a dubious area because it comes down to me as rumor and legend. As you can imagine, I was not there for it.
LOU: *Don't worry — a lot of legends pass into fact if we don't dispute them, and I won't dispute...*
BILL: A lot of facts pass into legend.
LOU: *Yeah. That, too. Let's see, you went to New York University...*
BILL: That's true.
LOU: *...probably in the early Thirties?*
BILL: I got out in 1938.
LOU: *That was almost at the tail end of the Depression, right?*
BILL: It was the renewal of a new recession. The tail end of the absolute pit of the Depression was 1932. There was a recovery steadily until 1938 — when they heard

© 1973 DC Comics

ing ground in the world for writing."

I was getting out of college and beginning to work. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *When you were in college you were contributing to literary magazines?*

BILL: Literary magazines — and I sold a couple of things to science-fiction magazines. They had contests and stuff like that.

LOU: *Okay, and then you started selling things to COLLIERS and LIBERTY and various articles and such like that.*

BILL: Not COLLIERS really.

LOU: *Well, it says, "...and then he started selling stories to slick magazines like COLLIERS and LIBERTY." That's what Steranko says.*

BILL: Ah yes, that's a mistake. What I actually told him was that COLLIERS was the height of what we were all aiming for, and I never could understand why COLLIERS never seized on me — my obvious literary talents. I kept ending up with LIBERTY and HOUSEHOLD and TORONTO STAR WEEKLY and the places where I did sell.

LOU: *But they paid!*

BILL: Yeah. And, of course, they were slick magazines — and most comic-book writers were pulp graduates. I was, therefore, a thing apart.

LOU: *Did they look upon you with contempt for that?*

BILL: No. I'm afraid the opposite. Actually, it was not justified, as I kept pointing out to them, because I thought pulps were much better products. But slicks had their own kind of tricks and quirks which I had mastered along the way and they had not.

LOU: *You're talking about writers like — ?*

BILL: Manly Wade Wellman, Otto Binder, Bill Millard, *etcetera.*

LOU: *Gardner Fox and all this kind, right?*

BILL: I didn't know Gardner.

LOU: *Also Alfie Bester, I guess.*

BILL: I didn't know Alfie either.

LOU: *Well, let's see — it says that you took a job as a copywriter with an ad agency at about 23 bucks a week.*

BILL: It was called Batten, Barton, Durkin and Osborn

LOU: *B, B, D & O itself?*

BILL: B, B, D & O itself! The best definition I ever heard of it was that it sounds like a trunk falling down the stairs. *(Laughter.)* Doesn't it? Batten, Barton, Durkin and Osborn.

LOU: *You're right.* (Laughter.) *That was pretty good money back in those days wasn't it — $23 a week?*

BILL: It was incredible. You have to multiply that by...I don't know what the multiple would be, from 1938 to now, but it's certainly ten times and quite possibly more.

LOU: *You just got bored with copywriting or something like that?*

BILL: No. Every now and again I sold a slick magazine story for what was then horrendously high — for that time. It was $150 or $200 that I would get, so it occurred to me that seven or eight weeks of work — of commuting from Brooklyn back and forth — at the end of the week you have $23. Whereas, you sell one story — you've got $200. Of course, what's left out of this is how often do you sell one story?

LOU: *That's true.*

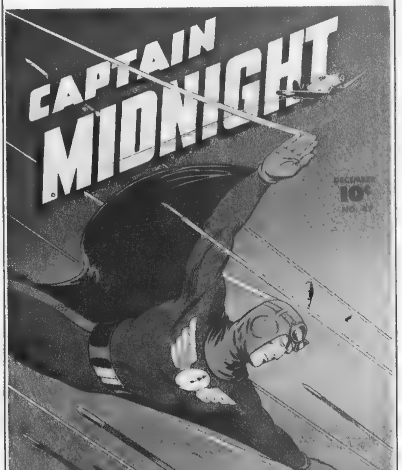
BILL: In the end, I decided my career was writing. A hideous mistake, by the way! *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *I think there might be a few people who would debate that, Bill.*

BILL: Not with vigor.

LOU: *Can you tell me about your first encounter with the world of comics? Why did you decide to get into comics?*

BILL: I decided to get into anything that would pay a living. I was making, as I said, these occasional slick magazine sales which came at unpredictable intervals. If they came at twelve weeks or fourteen and then another at four weeks — it's hard to hang suspended without dinner, lunch, whatever, for four or five weeks. So I was looking for something steadier inbetween and it struck me — possibly comics. I sent off an outline to **Harry Shorten** at MLJ Publications and I heard nothing from him. And then, for the first time in my life — since I'm rather backward about time and this kind of thing — I went up to find out what could have happened to this.



Bill wrote many CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT stories.

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"I wrote anything that came along."

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It seemed perfectly fine to me. And, of course, he had it filed away in a drawer called "Miscellaneous — Forget It," and he pulled it out — he had never read it or seen it before. He looked at it and said, "No, that's not what we really want. What we want is something with heroes" or whatever. And they had a thing called THE WIZARD. .

LOU: *The Man with the Super Brain.*

BILL: Was he?

LOU: *Yeah.*

BILL: Anyway, he was called THE WIZARD, and it was **Paul Reinman** who drew it.

LOU: *Right. He was drawing comics all the way up through the Sixties.*

BILL: Is he now not with us?

LOU: *I don't know what he's doing right now. The thing was, he went back to MLJ, which by then was called Archie Comics in the 1960s, and he drew their characters which were revivals from the Forties -- which included, of course, the Wizard.*

BILL: Ah. Well, **Harvey Shorten** wanted a Wizard kind of thing and while sitting there trying to think of a villain, I came up with something startlingly new — incandescently brilliant! — called The Jingler, the guy who makes jingles. You can't beat that for an idea.

LOU: *No, not really.* (Laughter.)

BILL: He said "Great," leaping at me across the desk, "Do it!" And I did it, and they liked that extravagantly — much more extravagantly than it deserved. And then I got other things to write. **Bob Kanigher** was breaking in at MLJ when I was, around 1942. **Irv Novick** was there at the time, too, you know — and a guy named **Harry Luce,** I think. **Luce** was his last name — **Frank Luce** or **Harry Luce** — I don't know. He was drawing a thing called THE HANGMAN, and I wrote those, too. Within a short while, Harry and **John Goldwater** had decided I was their writer. I kept figuring out how many pages have you got here, how much work can I do — and it didn't come up to a lot of work. So I mentioned it to **Harry Shorten** who said, "No, no, you just keep working and you'll see it all works out." And I said. "Well, I think mathematics still works, you know." Thirty-two pages a book and that many pages a month, *etcetera.* **Shorten** said, "Don't worry, you'll be the last to feel a cutback." This was in the presence of **Harry Stein** and another writer who was there at the time who said to him, "Harry, you're on the way out. **Woolfolk** is on the way in." Which endeared me to Harry no end.

LOU: *I'm sure.*

BILL: People would go around endearing you to other people like that — and I had, unknown to me, acquired an enemy.

LOU: *Did you have trepidations about walking home alone that night?*

Bill created the BLACK HOOD for Archie Comics in the Forties.

BILL: I had no idea. I was quite fond of Harry until I discovered that he was going around spreading rumors and scandals to all kinds of people. I had a genuine enemy — which, I may say, excited me. I had never had someone who was a genuine enemy! *(Laughter.)* My aim at the time was to make $20 a week and continue writing for the slicks.

LOU: *Which you did, obviously.*

BILL: No. I am extravagantly fond of comics, I must say. I like to look back on it as the best fun I ever had writing. I forget exactly what the pay was, but it was like two or three dollars a page, and at that time you had to — and this is another mistake **Steranko** made — you had to come in and put in the dialogue. You know, you describe the action for the artist in a single line — I think they still do at some places — and then you come in and put in dialogue. I was not used to this, being a story writer **Steranko** for some reason, when I told him this story, got the idea that I was the one who invented this process. I was not at all. That was in practice at MLJ at the time I arrived there

LOU: *You were writing various things like BLACK HOOD, STEEL STERLING, SHIELD?*

BILL: BLACK HOOD. That I started. I wrote several of the early ARCHIE stories for **Bob Montana,** and for a feature about

"I never met Eisner when I wrote THE SPIRIT."

wizards he was drawing for **Charlie Biro** There were some minor ones, too. I invented a tiny feature called MOUSEKETEERS. It was the last thing I did and I made sure it was very funny so that **John Goldwater** would deeply regret my leaving. *(Laughter.)* And I was leaving because of **Harry Shorten**.

LOU: *You didn't get along with Shorten that well?*

BILL: **Shorten** was a good, tough-minded editor but . . . well, let me tell you a story. In those days, they had little four-page things they did, "Biographies of Famous People," and he told me, "Okay, knock off one on **Beethoven**. Make sure you put in there that he was blind." *(Laughter.)* I said, "You mean deaf, don't you?" He said, "Don't tell me the poor bastard was deaf, too!" *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Oh, right.*

BILL: However, he was a star at N.Y.U. in football. He was #48 and I watched him many times. We were practically contemporaries, and it was thrilling to meet a genuine football star. He didn't wear a helmet, though.

LOU: *Sometimes, from what I've seen, I wonder if the mentality of comics editors has changed — but I'm going to take that back, because I'm sure a whole bunch of comic-book editors would come down and kill me if I said that.*

BILL: That's the only danger. Other than that, you hit it on the head. *(Laughter.)* In those days, of course, by a kind of rule — which means there's almost as many exceptions as by the rule — they only hired third-rate writers to be the editors. They couldn't afford to have a first-rate writer, even a second-rate writer, being an editor.

LOU: *Shorten was still around in comics at least until the mid-Sixties at Tower. He brought out a line of comics at Tower called THUNDER AGENTS.*

BILL: I didn't know that he brought out Tower Books, but we'd met at that time and he wanted to get some advice. I was in publishing and he wanted to get advice on what he should do and how things should go. I remember we met at a restaurant and talked all about it at lunch.

LOU: *He hired Wally Wood to create his characters.*

BILL: Well, that shows good taste there.

LOU: *Definitely. Okay, I'm getting into Fawcett right now.*

BILL: I'll answer the question in advance — while I was working at MLJ, I had done a story for a guy named **Warren King** (later on he became the editorial cartoonist for THE DAILY NEWS, replacing, I think, **Batchelor** — but at that time he was a comic book artist.) Anyway, I had done a story for him for whatever character it was, which I now forget.

LOU: *HANGMAN, I think.*

BILL: Whatever it was, it had somebody dangling over a huge violin on the splash page. This was an idea I had had. He brought this book to Fawcett to try to get a job as an artist, and they were not interested in this artist — but they were interested in the writer. And the guy who was interested in the writer was **John Beardsley**, who had just become an editor at Fawcett — and there you have another example of editors. Actually, **Harry Shorten** knew about five times as much as he knew! *(Laughter.)* Mind you, this sounds very bitter and I'm not at all — I rather liked John in a completely irresponsible way — but he would do things like turn down or send back stories, one out of four, randomly, just to keep you up to the mark

LOU: *My lord!*

BILL: So now the fourth story he'd turn down would happen to be the best one I'd written. *(Laughter.)* Which arouses my ire. "Why did you buy these other admittedly terrible stories I wrote and turn this one down?"

LOU: *Let's see . . . you worked for Fawcett, then Beardsley brought you into the Quality group?*

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"Reed Crandall was the best artist I knew."

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Blackhawk, drawn by one of Bill's favorite artists, Reed Crandall.

BILL: That's true. What happened, he was hired by **Busy Arnold**, and I had written some stuff — Fawcett had invited me up — and my editor was **Otto Binder**, who was there for that brief period.

LOU: *Your editor at Fawcett was Otto Binder?*

BILL: Yeah. When I went up to Fawcett the one I met was **Otto Binder** — and by that time I think **Rod Reed** was there Everybody had left. **Ed Herron** had left.

LOU: *They were being drafted or they just left?*

BILL: I don't know. I think **Ed Herron** had been bounced because he was writing stories on the sly. But, in any event, he was out and **Rod Reed** was, in my estimation, the editor in charge at the time. And Otto was there also, but Otto immediately discovered that editorial pay did not equal freelance pay. Did you know that **Stanley Kauffman**, the eminent theatre, book and movie critic, was a comic-book editor at Fawcett? He edited CAPTAIN MIDNITE and I wrote several stories for him. Meanwhile, the War had broken out and writers were getting in very short supply. They were being drafted as prime cannon fodder. And so Otto was immediately leaving which I felt was a blow. Why should he leave just when I found him admiring me? You don't have that many admirers in the world. But when **Beardsley** went over to Qualty he said to **Rod Reed**, "**Woolfolk** is my discovery —" since, apparently, he was the one who had listened to **Warren King** "— and I think I'm entitled to take **Woolfolk** with me." And Rod said, "Can't we share him?" And I told Rod, "What do you mean, 'Can we share him?' *Of course* we share him — I need all the goddamn work I can get!" *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *So then you were doing stuff like DOLL MAN and PLASTIC MAN and BLACKHAWK?*

BILL: I handled that with **Reed Crandall** and, I think, **Alex Kotsky** — but that's vaguely in my mind. I'm sure I did.

LOU: *Give me some of your feelings about Crandall.*

BILL: He was the out-and-out best artist I knew at the time — and I don't know anybody who drew more dimensional figures with more realism than **Crandall** did. It was a great pleasure, indeed, to write these bold words on the page and see it come out so fully fleshed.

LOU: *From what I heard, he was kind of a countrified guy, wasn't he?*

BILL: I hardly met him. We were working together at one stage just before the War ended. **Busy Arnold** was going to give us both 25% of BLACKHAWK. **Reed** would get 25%. I would get 25%. At that stage, we thought we were millionaires. What did we know, of course? And things were selling... they were selling 102% — selling beyond the spoilage rate. If they had a magazine just lying around tattered or whatever, they would not turn it back because it would sell eventually.

LOU: *Was this at the time of the paper shortages?*

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"I am extravagantly fond of comics."

BILL: This is the War and during the cruelly overwhelming paper shortages. What you got was 80% of an allotment of paper that you had before. And, of course, a lot of people who hadn't got the paper allotment were shut out and just dropped out of the field. And so just a few fortunate people who had paper allotments were in — and they only got 80%.

LOU: *Getting back to Fawcett, did you have anything to do with the creation of Captain Marvel, Jr.?*

BILL: I will tell you what I told **Steranko** — as best I can remember what I told **Steranko**. He mentioned the Captain Nazi thing.

I said I wrote some Captain Nazi. And he said, "You were there in the beginning." I said, "There is some confusion here in my own mind, which I simply don't remember even now — but it seems to me like the original Captain Marvel story and then the second story or whatever were switched, and if I didn't write the first or the second I certainly wrote the third — and they didn't appear in the order in which they were written." So I don't know which was which. My off-hand feeling is that's a bit earlier than my time — but if it's not, then I did it. If it is — then I did the second or the third or something along the way.

LOU: *In other words you had your hands in that first early Captain Nazi and Captain Marvel, Jr., story?*

BILL: I swear I don't know. I'd have to go back 45 years. Talking to **Steranko** was a new experience to me because it was my first comics interview, and there I was ransacking a memory that was faulty at best. But in looking back over those things, it suddenly occurred to me for the first time why I had remained comparatively anonymous — altogether anonymous, compared to guys who were so well known — when in truth, though I am the one to say it, I got the best pay and got the best reviews from editors, you know, at the time. Editors all thought I was a darling, and as to how the readers felt...

LOU: *I'm sure they felt the same thing.*

BILL: No, I really don't think so — and that's my point, actually. Because never, along the way, did I invent anything. I was like an expert handyman. I sort of ran around doing any feature that was available. The editors were all delighted because it was smooth and they didn't have to edit it much. I handled anything that came along — I'd done all those CAPTAIN MARVELs — but not one thing was ever invented in my name. Sivana or Tawny the Talking Tiger or Mr. Mind — none of them were my doing.

LOU: *Also during the War, as a matter of fact, you were doing THE SPIRIT along with several other writers like Wellman...*

BILL: . . and **Bill Millard.**

LOU: *Bill Millard?*

BILL: **Bill Millard** wrote a lot of SPIRITS

LOU: *That's a new one to me. What was it like working on THE SPIRIT?*

BILL: The memories are only these — working with **Lou Fine**, whom I much liked and admired. I met **Will Eisner** only once. He was already in the Army. He was visiting his former stomping grounds and clients.

LOU: *Did he make any comments about how THE SPIRIT was being handled?*

BILL: Well, not to me. I don't know what he may have said to **Busy Arnold** or to other people who at the time wrote more. The time I met him was not when I was writing SPIRIT much. I did one or two, occasionally. Then, at one stage, I wrote quite a few.

LOU: *Do you remember any SPIRITs that you scripted?*

BILL: I happen to know of one that I remember because there is a small anecdote that goes with it. A friend of mine who worked in the Navy yard in Baltimore wrote to me one time and said, "Boy, there's a whole *cadre* of out-and-out fascists down here. We are at war with the Germans and there are about four or five of them here that are practically pro-**Hitler**." And I said, "No kidding." And he said, "Gee, if you could only write something in THE SPIRIT." And I said, "What can I write — there's fascists in the Navy yard?" He said, "Well, there's these two guys — their names are Pete and Bighead . . "

LOU: *Wow!*

Bill was instrumental in creating Captain Marvel, Jr.

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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFFT

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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFFT

COMICS INTERVIEW

BECAUSE WE CARE. BECAUSE THE PROS CARE. BECAUSE YOU CARE.

"1949 was the peak year for comics."

© 1984 Will Eisner

BILL: And I said, "That's great for comics names." So I made Nazi villains — Pete and Bighead — who were going to sabotage a shipyard and The Spirit prevents them. I asked my friend later, "What was the reaction down there?" He said, "Riotous. The whole place moved because they were fascists and they laughed." I said, "What did Pete and Bighead say?" "They said, 'See, those commies even got to The Spirit.'" *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *You said you never created anything, but there was one that I believe you did create — which was THE MAD HATTER, right?*

BILL: Oh. That was my own book. That was my own published book.

LOU: *O. W. Comics, right?*

BILL: Yes. I was **Woolfolk** and he was **J. J. Oxton.** He was a friend of mine and worked for Paramount Newsreel.

LOU: *So you just decided to get together?*

BILL: We knew what comics were selling at the time. Everyone was desperate to get into the field because it was really like printing money — if you could somehow get ahold of some paper somewhere — and you were always just missing. **Ernie Bailey** had some paper which I nearly got. **Jerry Gale** nearly got some paper. You were always coming up with these near misses. And finally, when I got hold of some paper — everybody else got hold of some paper at the same time!

LOU: *So you had this character — THE MAD HATTER...*

BILL: The first one was drawn by **John Giunta**, and **Mort Leav** drew the second one.

LOU: *From the description I have, the Mad Hatter was just his guy who was a reporter with a hat insignia on his chest, right?*

BILL: That is the only thing I remember. I don't remember what he was or anything else about him. He had a hat insignia very much like Batman. I wanted to do a standard feature. Even though it was my own — it shows you the conventional frame of mind that I had. I was doing just what everybody else was doing and not taking any chances.

LOU: *So, what happened?*

BILL: The whole thing became an entire mess. I had the paper but I couldn't get a printer at all. They were willing to print it at whatever it was at the time, $30 per 1000 copies — which was outrageous and put the break-even point so high you couldn't live. Then we had to mark it down from a 48-page book to a 32-page book because that fit the printer's color presses or something — he'd never told us that he didn't have a 48-page press. So months after it had been stalled and stalled and stalled, I sent **Jack Oxton** up there and he came back and said, "He only has a 32-page press." So we had to cut a 48-page book to a 32, and that's something like letting TV editors mangle a movie.

Bill wrote a number of SPIRIT stories.

LOU: *I can imagine. And then Max Gaines bought out your other book — which was ANIMAL FABLES, right?*

BILL: Yeah, I had two: THE MAD HATTER and ANIMAL FABLES. That was involved with my wife, Dorothy — she wasn't then my wife. She was editing at **Max Gaines'.**

LOU: *Is it true that she was writing the "Lois Lane" strip in SUPERMAN comics and you writing SUPERMAN then?*

BILL: That was much later, after we were married. She was hired by **Shelly Mayer** and she was replaced by **Julie Schwartz.** She was an editor and **Julie Schwartz** took her job after she left.

LOU: *What titles was she editing?*

BILL: I don't think she edited books separately. I think she was like — though I'm not really positive about this — **Sheldon Mayer's** general assistant or something, and worked on whatever was coming up. **Sheldon Mayer** was the resident genius downtown at DC. Uptown DC, the resident genius was **Mort Weisinger.**

COMING IN PART TWO: *Bill reveals what he really thinks about Mort, Stan Lee, the comic-book industry and how his career as a best-selling novelist took off in the no punches-pulled conclusion next issue!*

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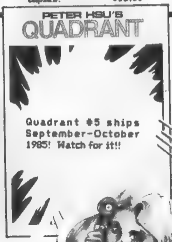

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"Five inkers tested for CAMELOT 3000."

BRUCE D. PATTERSON

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Bruce D Patterson
Born: 6 January 53
Residence: South Gate, CA

Credits: Inked LEGION OF SUPER HEROES, MASTER OF KUNG FU, SPECTACTULAR SPIDER-MAN, SPIDER-WOMAN, CAMELOT 3000, MICRONAUTS, WARP, "Black Flame" — backup in MARS — GREEN ARROW, GREEN LANTERN. Lettered lots of stuff, colored lots of stuff, drew ads for First Comics for first half-year, was production coordinator for First Comics for first year.
Hobbies: Japanese Animation — books, models, toys! Toys! TOYS! — Micronauts toys, drawing for SCREW Magazine, movies, computer games and art.
Goals: My own book! Untold wealth!

Bruce is perhaps one of the most opinionated, outspoken and blunt creators I have ever met. Yet somehow his outrageousness is tempered by his keen sense of humor. This guy is hilarious. Patterson is an iconoclast. Although an artist in his own right, at this point in his career he generally contents himself to ink other people's pencils. Yet I get the impression that Bruce intends to eventually make a really significant contribution to comics as a writer/penciller. This interview took place in the crowded environs of the Ambassador Hotel in Hollywood, California, at the Los Angeles Science Fiction and Comic Book Convention. While such luminaries as Joe Shuster, Mike Royer, Bob Foster, and Burne

"SCREW gave me a cover assignment."

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Hogarth circulated through the Con, Bruce and I rapped away surrounded by a huge stack of original CAMELOT 3000 and GREEN LANTERN artwork. So sit back and prepare to be outraged and amused...

KEN JONES: *What was your first big break in the business?*

BRUCE PATTERSON: I worked for **Neal Adams'** Continuity Associates, starting in 1975 — that was my first big job. I was doing backgrounds on the SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN. I walked into Continuity one week and asked them if they had any work to do and Neal said, "Yeah, we need someone to do backgrounds," so I got to do some work with **Bob Wiacek, Terry Austin, Carl Potts** and **Joe Brozowski**, who has done some pencilling for Marvel. It's my tenth anniversary in the business — I actually started in the business by doing a Charlton back-up.

KEN: *Tell us about that.*

BRUCE: It was a Mike Mauser story. Years ago a friend of mine knew **Joe Staton** — so I came up with a character, he came up with a story — and I hired **Joe Staton** to draw it. I inked it and lettered it and it's abysmal. You look at it today and it's like "doggie-do," so it'll never see the light of day. But I used it in my portfolio and showed it to **Nick Cuti** in the summer of '75 and he gave me a Mike Mauser story to ink. They kind of liked it, except being naive about the business, I didn't know that people use rulers for backgrounds and gun barrels and stuff like that. So the first comment I got from Nick was, "You didn't use a ruler," and I said, "Was I supposed to?" I've learned a lot since then, I use a ruler.

KEN: *What kind of advice can you give to young artists?*

BRUCE: Practice! Nothing happens overnight. Unless you are someone who is incredibly gifted to begin with, you're going to have to just work, work, work and develop your skills. It takes a lot just to get to entry level. Right now, it's very difficult to break in unless you're extremely great, or have a great idea that more or less includes you coming along for the ride. Otherwise, you have to start out an assistant to somebody. That's a good way to start out. Most pros did it that way. I don't know too many people who were born full-grown.

KEN: *How would you go about becoming somebody's assistant, if you were a young artist?*

BRUCE: Save up your money and go to New York. That's the only way to do it. Most of the guys are in New York, most of the studios are in New York.

Bruce is the regular inker of GREEN LANTERN.

KEN: *Tell us about working for SCREW Magazine. I would assume you worked for Al Goldstein?*

BRUCE: I've never met the guy. I haven't done any work for them in over a year, almost two years. Back when I was working for **Neal Adams** and Continuity, I needed other ways of making money. Since I've always been interested in pornography for whatever deviant reasons — I don't know — I went over to a couple of magazines and showed them my art. A couple of places bought stuff and SCREW actually gave me an assignment to do a cover. My first cover was a guy wearing a "happy face" being whipped by a dominant woman. It's the first SCREW cover — and probably the last — that has a word balloon. She is saying — in a German accent — "Vipe that silly grin off your face." That was my start in pornography. Since that time, I've done a whole bunch of covers, and even wrote an article that was kind of rude, to say the least. The thing I like about SCREW is that I can do pretty much anything. You can't get nasty on the covers. You can't show hardcore on the covers because they're out there on the newsstands and you can't offend the general public. But they can be sexy and they can be funny — so that's kind of a challenge. I use those kinds of as-

"I don't want comics to become hardcore."

signments to test my techniques. I even experimented with doing the separations on the covers, because we do those ourselves if we want to make an extra $25. I like to do pornography for the technical challenge and to get my mind off comics. It breaks up the monotony of doing the same thing all the time.

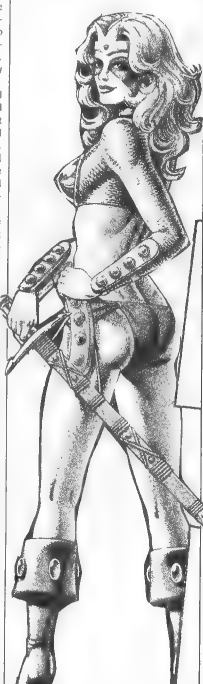
KEN: *Let's talk about your experiences at First Comics.*

BRUCE: It was tons of fun. I was hired through **Joe Staton**, who has been a friend during most of my career in comics. He went out in about 1981 on this secret project and nobody knew exactly what he was doing. Around the summer of 1982 I get this call and Joe says, "I want you to work with me at First Comics." **Mike Gold** called me and we firmed up the deal and I moved to Chicago from New York. It was okay for a while. I was doing all the ads, doing as much of the paste-up and re-touching as we could get done. I was coloring all the house ads, generally, doing all the mechanical stuff that had to be done at the office. That went on until we found a guy to assist us.

Even though it doesn't sound like a lot, six books can be a heavy load when you're doing *all* the work every month. When you have to check all the proofs and stuff, that can get to be heavy. Halfway into my year at First they started changing everything around. We weren't allowed to do the kinds of ads I wanted to do. The publisher wanted to switch to a more copy-oriented kind of ad, so we just ended up doing paste-ups and it got to be boring. The schedule finally got boring to me. I couldn't get along creatively, so I just left. I was freelancing for them for a while until I quit over a dispute

KEN: *So you worked on WARP and you worked on the "Black Flame" back-up in MARS, right?*

BRUCE: First's WARP comic I got into by mistake. At the time, I was inking CAMELOT 3000 and was the production coordinator for First Comics. I thought I could do both and I pretty much handled it. But I had to start doing work for First at home instead of the office and that conflicted, so I got further behind on my CAMELOT deadlines. Being the idiot that I am, they kept pressuring me at First to ink WARP because they were having trouble with the inker, so I said, "Okay, I'll do it." In the process, I did a half-assed job inking WARP #3 and started screwing up on the deadlines on CAMELOT #6. That was where everything just fell apart. I ended up inking WARP, dropped CAMELOT and just continued to do my coordinator jobs. I only continued with WARP for another two issues, then did back-ups. "Black Flame" was something I was really interested in. I went so far as to design a costume when the character might have been a female. I liked "Black Flame" at first, but then Peter went off on a weird bend and I started blowing deadlines and got into an argument with **Mike Gold** about it, and just stormed out of the office and quit. That's when everything just started to crumble up in little pieces.



Detail from an ad Bruce did for First Comics.

KEN: *Let's backtrack and talk about production work again. What did you actually do?*

BRUCE: Well, basically, all we had to do at First was make sure all the gutters were cleaned up, make sure that none of the lines were flying off the page, and make sure that all the lettering was correct, because even the best letterer sometimes misspells a word. Production makes all of those corrections. We also made sure everything was sent out on time to the printer. When we got the proofs back from the separators, I would go over those to make sure that they'd separated the work properly, that they hadn't spilled color all over the panels. That was the most fun — seeing the three-millimeter overlays of what the covers looked like and how they separated them.

KEN: *Let's talk about some of your hobbies. Let's talk about the influences of movies on your work.*

BRUCE: I get to take a deduction on my income tax. When I first moved back to Los Angeles in 1980, I went to movies almost every day because I'd get really depressed about my lack of work. My books got cancelled one by one, I was working on MASTER OF KUNG FU and I quit it. I was working on CAPTAIN MARVEL and MS. MARVEL — then they both got flattened, so I was into a period of total freelance, where I'd never know what I was doing next. I don't know what kind of influence movies have on me, but I do have a tendency to watch a lot of adventure movies, and those of an adult nature.

KEN: *Shall we mention that Paul Power just walked up?*

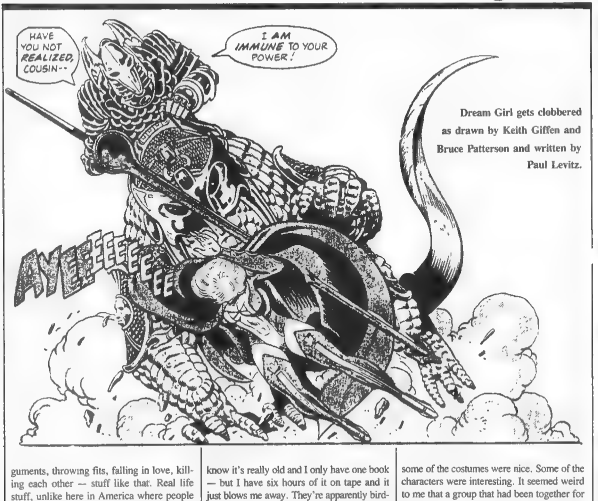
BRUCE: One of the nicest guys in comics — he's never offended anybody.

PAUL: I would never do that. *(Laughter.)* Do you know that Bruce and I are getting married next month?

KEN: *And you heard it first in COMICS INTERVIEW! But, seriously, let's talk about Japanese animation.*

BRUCE: I love the new stuff. I've been a fan of robots since Mattel released the SHOGUN WARRIORS toys in the mid '70s — but I'd never seen much of the animation, except ASTROBOY. When I was in Chicago working for First Comics, I met this guy who was a Japanese animation fan. He had a club that we went over to and we were just blown away. We saw this thing called ZAMUNGO, which hasn't been shown in America, but it's absolutely incredible stuff. It's about real human beings having petty ar-

"CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS is great."



© 1986 DC Comics

Dream Girl gets clobbered as drawn by Keith Giffen and Bruce Patterson and written by Paul Levitz.

guments, throwing fits, falling in love, killing each other — stuff like that. Real life stuff, unlike here in America where people get in a tight spot and gag their way out. It was a series, a continuing story. I was hooked. In the last couple of years, I've bought the books, the toys, I've even got a couple of hours of animation on tape of the various Japanese robots. There's more to life out there than TRANZOR Z and VOLTRON. I think the best example if the Macross Saga that's being shown right now — you know, ROBOTECH. That's absolutely brilliant, and they're treating it with respect — which is unusual for Americans, who had a tendency to downgrade anything foreign.

KEN: *What can you turn us on to that we might know about in Japanese comic books?*

BRUCE: I don't collect any of the little black-and-white books. I collect the full color books. I am sort of a color freak. The best ones I've seen are the MACROSS series. The new ones they're adapting — MOSPEADA — it's really nice. I've seen a couple of small paperback books that they call *animas*. It depends on what you like. There's lots of stuff that I take a look at and I go crazy. My favorite now is a thing called CORABATTLER-DUNBYNE. As far as I know it's really old and I only have one book — but I have six hours of it on tape and it just blows me away. They're apparently bird-like robots manned by individual people and it's set in a medieval world that has a combination of castle and robots and horse-drawn vehicles. It's really bizarre. This newer Japanese stuff just makes our new stuff like MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE look sick. But then old Hanna-Barbara makes MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE look sick.

KEN: *As a fellow toy collector, I am interested to know what you collect.*

BRUCE: I started with the SHOGUN WARRIORS, then moved on to the MICRONAUTS that were made by Mego. I collected everything that was produced in America, then moved on to the Japanese import giant robots. Now I collect a lot of MACROSS stuff, such as models and I have a lot of CORABATTLER-DUNBYNE models. I collected STAR WARS toys, but I am trying to get rid of those so I can have room for my robots.

KEN: *Let's talk about some of the books you've worked on and you can free associate. Tell us about the LEGION OF SUPERHEROES.*

BRUCE: Well, it had a bunch of guys and some of the costumes were nice. Some of the characters were interesting. It seemed weird to me that a group that had been together for several years just didn't mesh properly. They'd always be bickering, throwing temper tantrums, and acting like a bunch of children. They were supposed to be young adults and used to working as a team. Yet here they are acting very noble at one point, then like little children at another, so I just said, "The heck with it "

KEN: *Tell us about your MASTER OF KUNG FU work.*

BRUCE: That was one of my first regular series. After almost two years, I finally did a job that Marvel liked — an IRON MAN over **Keith Giffen**. Ironically enough, they liked that job well enough so that they gave me MASTER OF KUNG FU. After the first issue of that, they liked my work well enough to give me the series regularly. I inked **Mike Zeck's** pencils and it was okay, but it got kind of crazy with the oriental philosophy, when what I really wanted to see was lots of action, but what can I say?

KEN: *How about the SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN?*

"Bolland is one of the best artists."

BRUCE: That was real brief. I worked on that when I moved back to California. I kinda liked it. I got to work on **Marie Severin**, who's a really good penciller and a nice lady, too. I was having a good time when the powers that be decided they needed someone to ink the SPIDER-WOMAN comic, and so they switched me over and I kept getting further and further behind, because I'd get the book a week before it was due and it'd be seventeen pages of really detailed pencils and I just couldn't handle that

KEN: *Steve Leialoha was pencilling it at that time?*

BRUCE: Yeah, it was beautiful stuff — but I needed at least two weeks to do a really good job.

KEN: *Let's talk about the MICRONAUTS.*

BRUCE: That's a book I'd been trying to get on since **Mike Golden** worked on it. After trying to get in when **Pat Broderick** was drawing it, and losing out to someone else, I ended up saying, "Heck, I'll never do it." Then, one day, **Peter Gillis** came into First Comics and told me he was writing the MICRONAUTS and I said, "I want to ink it." So Peter told **Ralph Macchio** at Marvel and they looked at my CAMELOT work and liked it — so I got on the MICRONAUTS. It was fun for a while, but then it got a little bit too heavy. Normally, I can do two pages of inking a day, but on the MICRONAUTS it was only about a page a day — then sometimes not even that, because there was just too much detail. And I don't like to block things out or omit detail unless it's absolutely necessary. I just couldn't justify it on that book.

KEN: *Let's talk about CAMELOT 3000.*

BRUCE: That was the tightest pencils I ever worked on, by one of the best artists I've ever seen in the business, **Brian Bolland**. It was lots of fun. I had plenty of room to just concentrate on my technique, rather than worrying about redrawing figures like I've had to with some other artists I've worked with. It was a joy, generally speaking, then I got behind and lost the assignment.

KEN: *I guess you were the appropriate one to ink CAMELOT 3000?*

BRUCE: All I know is I tested. At least five people tested **Terry Austin** originally turned it down because he didn't have time in his busy schedule. They asked **Bob Smith**, but I don't know what became of that, other than I got the book. **Mike DeCarlo** was up, too.

KEN: *Let's talk about CAMELOT in terms of its adult content — printing it was a bold step for DC.*

BRUCE: I guess it was bold, in a way. I am so used to other mediums besides comics that — when comics do something bold — I say, "Oh, really?" because I've seen so much pornography and adult stuff — even the Japanese stuff is more adult than the American. When you see that stuff and compare it to Marvel or DC, it's like night and day. I liked the idea that Tristan and Isolde were both women, but hey — in that Japanese cartoon ROBOTECH, they just showed an episode where one of the main characters turned out to be a guy dressed as a woman. Let's face it, Uncle Miltie in the '50s was cross dressing, so it's been around a while. I don't want to see comics become hardcore, because that's pointless. For one thing, most of these guys can't draw figures anatomically correct to begin with, so how can they draw anatomically correct human figures in the nude? It'd be disgusting.

KEN: *Do you think that there was any kind of negative reaction from the public towards the "adult" slant CAMELOT had?*

BRUCE: I didn't hear any negative reaction to it, but by the time it had any impact I was gone. Apparently there wasn't any, because they continued it throughout the series. Besides, it's not directly connected to the DC superheroes and their more mainstream titles.

KEN: *They seem more interested in experimenting with titles like CAMELOT, RONIN by Frank Miller, or SWAMP THING.*

BRUCE: I like their experiments so far. Like I said with RONIN — it was different — and who really cared? But it was a bridge that comics needed to get **Moebius** into American comics. I wish Frank, now that he's done with that experiment, would get back to drawing something clearer, so that people could make sense of what he's doing — but it's up to him. You know, it's like **Jack Kirby** went from doing three-dimensional work to that really flat stuff he's been doing, so I guess everybody's got to evolve in their own way, whether you like it or not.

CAMELOT 3000: Bruce is proud of his work on it.

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"Like SHATTER or not — it exists."

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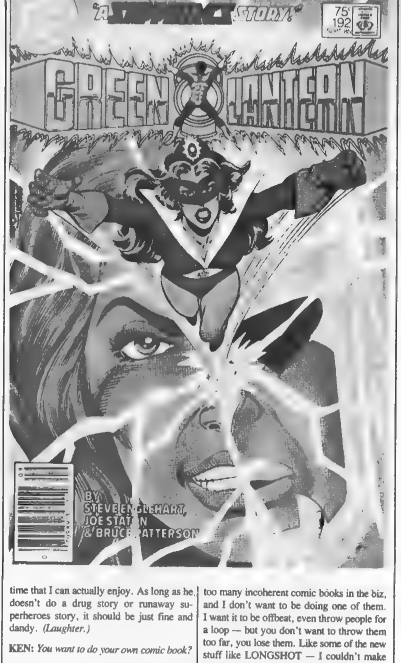

KEN: *Let's talk about computer art.*

BRUCE: I guess the Macintosh has taken everybody pretty much by storm. Whether you like SHATTER or not, it was interesting — that was the latest development in comics, and whether Marvel or DC wants to acknowledge it or not — it exists. I am doing my own little part. I've created a little generic space background that I used for GREEN LANTERN #193. It remains to be seen whether anybody will be able to tell if it was generated by a computer or not. We're not even sure how it will reproduce. It looked okay on a Xerox, but everybody knows a regular comic book is printed much worse than a Xerox, so who knows?

KEN: *You're currently working with Steve Englehart and Joe Staton on GREEN LANTERN — what can you tell us about that assignment?*

BRUCE: I don't really know too much about the storylines, and since I don't know, I am not sure if I can tell anybody. After the first sort of ordinary story that the current team turned out, interesting things have happened — the Predator storyline is pretty amazing.

KEN: *I think that you guys are doing a very radical turn on GREEN LANTERN and I love it.*

BRUCE: I don't know. I didn't really follow GREEN LANTERN before I got the project. **Dave Gibbons** is kind of an interesting artist, but I've never been a big fan of the GREEN LANTERN except during its high points. Like when **Neal Adams** worked on it, some of the **Gil Kane** stuff, and when **Joe Staton** worked on it the first time, because I actually did some of the background stuff for him on those. So my only contact with GREEN LANTERN has been when somebody I know has been working on it. I guess you could say the new GREEN LANTERN we're doing is a departure because, as far as I know, **Len Wein** was going to pick someone else to be the Predator. It was going to be a real full human being, not part of somebody, although I am not sure who he had in mind. Apparently **Englehart's** version has nothing to do with where Len was going.

KEN: *I'd like your perspective on how you think the CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTH series will change DC?*

BRUCE: That's a great series. DC really needed this kind of a change for a long time. Marvel's SECRET WARS, as far as I can tell, has done absolutely nothing towards changing the Marvel Universe. It didn't seem to change a single thing. To me, just as a casual reader of Marvel and of comics in general, I didn't see any changes at all — but this CRISIS thing really seems determined to straighten out the histories of DC. It's one of the first things that Marv's done in a long time that I can actually enjoy. As long as he doesn't do a drug story or runaway superheroes story, it should be just fine and dandy. *(Laughter.)*

KEN: *You want to do your own comic book?*

BRUCE: I've got some ideas kicking around, I've just got to figure out what I want to do with them. I've got about a hundred characters and I am trying to figure out a way to get them all into one place, to see if I can come up with a decent story. My GREEN LANTERN editor, **Andy Helfer**, is going to help me out. When it comes to the writing, I've got a beginning, I've got an end — but I haven't got a middle. I can have people just running around, but there are already too many incoherent comic books in the biz, and I don't want to be doing one of them. I want it to be offbeat, even throw people for a loop — but you don't want to throw them too far, you lose them. Like some of the new stuff like LONGSHOT — I couldn't make heads or tails out of it. I mean, where was the dialogue? The art was really nice and I hope **Art Adams** goes on to work for somebody who can write. LONGSHOT should have been a oneshot!

KEN: *What else don't you like about the comic-book industry?*

BRUCE: Marvel's arrogance, that they can print and sell anything — and fans' stupidity, which more or less confirms Marvel's ar-

"I've used a computer to create generic space

NO NEED FOR THAT I'M ALWAYS GLAD WHEN SOMEONE TAKES PITY ON MY LONELINESS.
BEING HIGH PRIESTESS OF A DEPOPULATED WORLD CAN BE QUITE BORING

Patterson over Willingham for First's WARP series.

rogance. I've heard of the circulation of SECRET WARS. I can't believe what I read in the first issue. Even though I only read the first issue, nobody sounded like themselves. It seemed like **Shooter** hadn't read a Marvel comic in years, so he didn't know who he was dealing with. After SECRET WARS was over, something changed! Spider-Man got this really nice new outfit that was alive, and they eventually had to kill it because it was deadly. The Thing wound up on another planet. Who lived? Who died? What changed? As far as I, a casual reader, could see — nothing changed. So what was the point? Then, the rash of bad reprints they did! The MICRONAUTS stuff, which was pretty decent in the first ten issues — why did they reprint them with bad colors, bad reproduction? Again, what was the point — except to make money? This pissed me off, because there is a lot of good stuff that should have been nurtured. It's depressing to know that Marvel can produce anything and make money, but DC's not blameless, either.

KEN: *What do you like in the alternative market?*

BRUCE: AMERICAN FLAGG. I don't like anything Comico's put out. I like the way MAGE is written, but I don't like the artwork. I kind of like the way ELEMENTALS is written, but I don't like the artwork, which is strictly amateurish. It's unguided. **Bill Willingham** needs to do some work under someone else. His inker needs to do some work under someone else. They're both untutored and they need to do some work. I like GRIMJACK, even though the artwork is a little funky. I liked E-MAN. What isn't known by a lot of people is that Joe, **Rick Oliver** and I co-wrote some of the first issues that weren't written by **Pasko**, including issue #9 that featured the oriental lady.

KEN: *Tiger Lily?*

BRUCE: I don't know who came up with the name, but we all worked on it.

KEN: *Maybe someone who'd just gone to Disneyland?*

BRUCE: Something like that. They were having trouble with **Pasko** and we had to come up with an issue real quick, because they were firing him and all they had was his one SMURFs plot. So we came up with the Tiger Lily story in a day or two. We started collaborating until **Nick Cuti** took over. I liked E-MAN generally speaking.

KEN: *What do you think about the cancellation of E-MAN?*

BRUCE: I know why it happened. Bad sales and some problems with Joe. Joe's had worse problems with First than I've had. Mine are meager compared to his. Suffice it to say, he has a hell of a story to tell you, if you ever decide to ask him. It was a nightmare. I don't read CEREBUS, although I hear it's

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backgrounds for GREEN LANTERN."

really good. I like most of the British stuff — I don't know why. Some of it's kind of stilted, but I like NEMESIS a lot.

KEN: *Who do you want to work with that you haven't?*

BRUCE: Kevin O'Neil. I want to ink him, but I have a feeling that he draws outlines and doesn't do what other pencillers do, so I guess he has to ink himself. I would like to ink one story by **Dave Gibbons.**

KEN: *How about writers?*

BRUCE: I don't care. There are a lot of writers I can't stand. I won't name names but about 80% of the writers I work with — I hate their work. But I really liked working with **Roger Stern**. I worked with him for awhile. **Englehart** seems to be doing really well with the GREEN LANTERN. All the twists and turns are incredible.

KEN: *How would you like to see comic books evolve?*

BRUCE: I'd like to see better characterizations. I'd like to see real people that I can identify with.

KEN: *Do you think that American audiences are resistant to experimental styles of art?*

BRUCE: Sure. How many people like **Alex Nino**'s artwork? Okay, that makes two of us! I loved his stuff, even his Warren stuff, which was written by a guy who could only swear.

KEN: *You're talking about 1984?*

BRUCE: Nice stuff. **Nino**'s stuff at DC was really nice. **Nestor Redondo's**... I loved his RIMA and most of his SWAMP THINGs were really nice. This is where "I hate **Marv Wolfman**" comes in. I was sitting around at Continuity when I was still a budding professional, and I told Marv that I really liked **Rudy Nebre's** art on DR. STRANGE. I told him when I saw that stuff, that it really blew me away, and he said, "Thank you, I really had to work with that stuff," because these Philippinos can't tell a story." So I said to him, "What are you talking about?" This was the most coherent stuff I've ever seen — you could have taken his words off and thrown them in the trash can, which they probably should have. It was beautiful. I can see the complaint with **Estaban Morato**, because he does major artwork in every panel of the story without concern as to how to *tell* a story. Maybe **Alfredo Alcala's** guilty, too, but **Nestor Redondo** and **Rudy Nebres** — they both understand fluid movement from panel to panel. They're not stupid, just because they don't speak English as well as we do. Well, maybe they speak it better than some of us. I don't see any reason to put their artwork down.

KEN: *Or pay them less than they do Americans?*

BRUCE: Well, that made sense at the time, because they were all living in the Philippines then. They don't live there now. They all live in America. The standard of living in the Philippines was so much lower than in America that you could pay them ten dollars a page and they were wealthy guys. But they wised up. They all moved over here, so they're making money. I've heard that Warren paid **Nino** pretty well.

KEN: *Any closing comments?*

BRUCE: Don't just buy something because it says Marvel, DC or First on the cover. Buy it because it's a good comic book, or buy it because it's kept you entertained. Buy, like, one issue of each title if you don't have a lot of money, then try to buy at least one title a month you don't normally buy. Give up your issue of SPIDER-MAN or TEEN TITANS or X-MEN, and pick up something different. Pick up an AMERICAN FLAGG, CEREBUS, even experiment. Educate yourself. There's more to comics than Marvel and DC. They're reprinting the SPIRIT; they're reprinting the British stuff; and if you're really smart you'll save up all your money and buy Japanese animation books — they're all in color and pretty — or give up comics and read PLAYBOY.

--AND FORGET NOT THAT YOU BOTH EXIST ONLY TO SERVE ME-- OLLERUS THE UNMERCIFUL!
NOW SAY ON, POPPO! WHAT OF THY PLAN TO HASTEN MY CONQUEST OF VALHALLA?

Bruce inked Ed Hannigan in THE DEFENDERS #66, written by David Kraft.

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BRUCE CONKLIN

The small college town of New Paltz, New York, is known for its view of Mohonk Mountain, the setting for the story in MS. TREE #9. Around the corner from Main Street sits an oddly shaped comics store, The October Country. Named with the Bradbury story in mind, Bruce Conklin — the store's owner — was also influenced by the month in which the World Series is held, as well as the appearance of the New Paltz countryside, lush with apple orchards at that time of the year. Since this is the only comics store between Rockland and Albany counties on the west side of the Hudson, Bruce's customers often drive forty miles or more to pick up their comics.

So it was that I ambled down from Woodstock, to interview Bruce, and to pick up the newest issue of SWAMP THING. I've known Conklin for many years. He's a man who knows what he thinks, and isn't afraid to let you know, as you will see from our conversation . . .

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Bruce Conklin
Occupation: Comic Store Owner
Born: 30 August 1952
Favorite Comics: JON SABLE, BATMAN, DETECTIVE, GRIM JACK, AMERICAN FLAGG, STAR SLAMMERS
Favorite Baseball Team: St. Louis Cardinals
Pet Peeve: After spending an hour putting up new books, a customer will come in and ask, "Anything new come in?"
Unrealized Ambition: Play third base for the Cardinals.

MITCH COHN: *We're here at the October Country comic-book store, card store — what else does it sell?*
BRUCE CONKLIN: Everything. Everything that has to do with collectibles, toys, books, science-fiction magazines. You know, if it's not here, I have it somewhere and we sell through the mail if we don't sell it in person. If you ask for it, I can find it.
MITCH: *Okay, we're here with Bruce Conklin, the owner of the store, and his employee, Jeff —*
JEFF HERMAN: Herman
MITCH: *Jeff apparently serves as Bruce's idea man.*
BRUCE: Yeah, he comes up with the ideas and I ignore them. *(Laughter.)*
MITCH: *And the store is located in New*

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"I'd love to expand, but it takes money."

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Paltz, New York, about 90 miles from New York City. How long ago did you start the store?

BRUCE: Well, we started the mail-order end of it about six years ago, six and a half. And the store itself has been open for, I guess, five years this June.

MITCH: *Wow! Long time for a comic-book store.*

BRUCE: Especially in a rural area.

MITCH: *And you've been in this one location the entire time?*

BRUCE: The whole time. There are a lot of comic-book people around here.

JEFF: Al Williamson.

BRUCE: Barry Smith was in here one day, selling comic books. I guess it was before he got going. He was over there selling comic books one day — I didn't know him from Adam that day. It's just this big guy, that's all, with an English accent. I think that was him. I'm not sure. I was told later that was probably him.

The store was popular even when it was owned by **Tom Moresco** back in the old days. You could find just about anybody here. Especially a group that started all at the same time. They all kind of knew each other. They were doing the same book, the WEIRD WORLDS book. **Kaluta, Wrightson,** and **Green.** They were all in that one book, and from that time period. At the same time **Kaluta** was doing WEIRD WORLDS, he was teaming up with **Wrightson** doing THE SHADOW. So, this was an interesting store. Fun to go in and out of, but it wasn't a business. Tom wasn't running it, he was doing it to have something to do while he was going to college. And nobody would come in. We'd just play checkers all day.

MITCH: *Is that where the later shop is now, that location?*

BRUCE: No, we used to play checkers and chess at the location where he was underneath, like in a cellar. You'd go in there and it'd look like the Batcave. It actually looked like things were growing on the walls. It was a cave.

JEFF: I remember that place. Then there was the upstairs place.

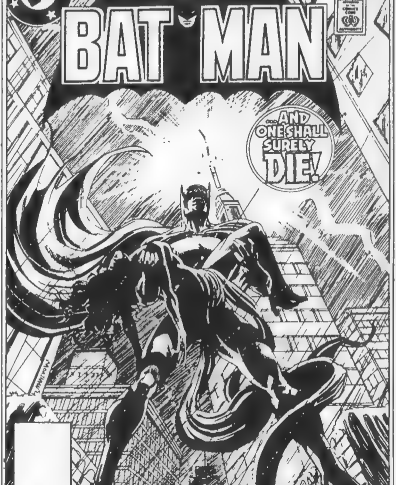
BRUCE: I decided not to go on Main Street. I'd rather not be on Main Street.

MITCH: *How come?*

BRUCE: Well, you got a whole lot of people hanging around in front of your store. Mothers don't drop their kids off to buy comic books. It just doesn't happen. Even though my major business is in kids.

MITCH: *You're in a unique situation for a comic store. I guess you'd probably rather be in a small town if it's a college town?*

BRUCE: I don't know about that. I think you can be in any small town that has a lot of traffic. You could be in a vacation town.



Bruce reads BATMAN and many other titles every month.

JEFF: Could you do this in Kingston?

BRUCE: Yeah, I believe you could. It's a matter of getting the word out to the right people, because I would say that maybe only 50% of my business comes from town. From the town itself. And that's only lately. Before that, I was doing most of my business from as far as forty miles away in Middletown. People who just don't want to go into the city for their books will come here. I get a lot — there's two guys who come up twice a year from New Rochelle, and they buy all the ELFQUEST stuff, because they don't want to go into the city to get it, and they don't have any outlet for the ELFQUEST material, so they come up twice a year and they spend $50 or whatever with us.

MITCH: *This close to Poughkeepsie, you've probably dealt in person with the Pinis.*

BRUCE: I've seen them! A couple of times. But I think if they're going to deal with a comic-book store, there's a comic-book store in Poughkeepsie and they deal with them.

MITCH: *So you don't get issues of ELFQUEST from them?*

BRUCE: No. I got one issue from them, and after that I got nothing. They said they would deliver twenty, but they didn't. They were

"I told people not to buy MS. MYSTIC."

on their way to San Diego, and there probably just wasn't time before they took off.

MITCH: *How long have you been working here, Jeff?*

JEFF: I think it'll be coming up on three —

BRUCE: Coming up on three years this summer.

MITCH: *And you're doing what with the other part of your life now?*

JEFF: Just trying to get through high school.

MITCH: *Do you plan to go on to college?*

JEFF: Yeah. I'm working on that.

MITCH: *So this whole thing could end when he graduates high school?*

BRUCE: As far as his association with the store?

MITCH: *Thus whole apprenticeship.*

BRUCE: Well, yeah, but there's a lot of things he could do if he left for college. He spends his summers here. You just don't tie him down to anything, that's all. He could run the store without me for a month at a time, so anytime he's ready to make money, to do something a little different, it's here. There's a lot more outlets we could go with. He's more interested in radio and rock music than this place!

MITCH: *Get out of this interview! If you're interested in those things more than comics!* (Laughter.)

BRUCE: I came from radio into comic books. I worked as a disk jockey for eight years.

MITCH: *Did you like it?*

BRUCE: Yeah. I loved it. But I got tired of working for someone else. There's enough down things that are personal, along the way, that you just get tired of them. If someone fires you in radio, they don't fire you because of your job, they fire you because they don't like you. What you are on the air reflects what you are personally. So they can end up not liking you, even if you're doing a good job. My last boss actually said, "I really like your show, I really like your work; it's just everything else." What! That buries you. What do you say to that? You just can't say anything. That was a particularly disappointing thing, because I'd been with that station. I didn't need that. That's why I had to work for myself. Actually, I worked for bars for awhile.

MITCH: *Bartending?*

BRUCE: Bartending, bouncing.

MITCH: *What comic books do you read?*

BRUCE: I read almost everything First does, for my own enjoyment. I read everything new, so I can tell people about it.

MITCH: *Everything?*

BRUCE: Everything that's new, so that I can tell people about it when they come in. If I don't read it, how can I have an opinion and tell people if it's good to buy or not?

MITCH: *Well, do you need to have an opinion on every single book that you carry?*

BRUCE: Yeah, because that's the way you sell comic books. If you don't have an opinion about the comic book, people can tell that you're not into the hobby. If you don't have an opinion of it, what's the sense in even running the store? If somebody comes in and asks you, and they're spending $20 a week on comic books, and their choice is whether or not to spend $1.50 on a new book or not, and they buy it, and it's a cruddy book, they're going to start cutting back. Pretty soon they won't be buying the good ones, if they get stung enough times. So if I read it, and pre-test the book, and give an opinion, "That's not a good book," you know —

MITCH: *You actually discourage people from buying?*

BRUCE: I definitely will.

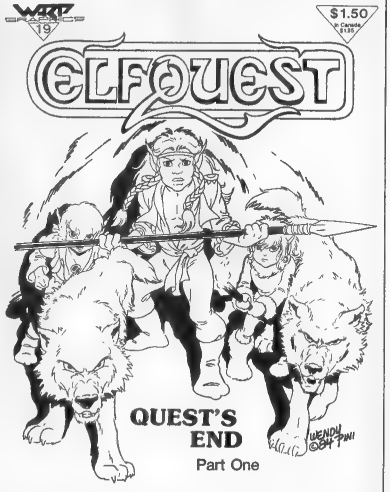
MITCH: *Did you do that with V?*

BRUCE: No, and I'll tell you why. I didn't do it with V because four people that read it said they liked it. Now I read it and it didn't make any sense to me. I told people I read it and it didn't make any sense to me, but four people read it and liked it, which means maybe a V fan will like the book.

A book like MS. MYSTIC came out and I told people definitely don't buy it. I'm stuck with 100 of them. That's $75. I take the loss — big deal! By the same token, they believe me on a book like First and I believe I sell as many First comics as any big store in this area. My quantities are nearly 100 per issue on a couple of the First comics, and I hear there's stores in Albany that can't give the damn things away. We sell as many back issues.

But yeah, you've got to read them. You've got to read the new stuff. I've read a few of the regular books. I'm a DC fan and I read BATMAN every month. I checked out the

Buyers came from miles around to get ELFQUEST from Bruce.



"For every success, there's five failures."

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new JLA, and if I have time, I read it every time it comes out. It looks like it's fun. It looks like it's more fun than usual. And there are Marvels I read now.

MITCH: *Wait a minute! Didn't you just before say you read everything?*

BRUCE: I read everything new. Every *new* title.

MITCH: *Oh.*

BRUCE: I read every new title that comes out. Now if it's a horrible #1, I won't read #2. And the things that are out on the racks, you know pretty much what they're like.

MITCH: *Here's an off-the-wall question: Did you look at MOTHER THERESA?*

BRUCE: **Joe Sinnott** did both the artwork and he inked it. It's as good a work as he's ever done. I wish that they'd get him a regular book again.

He's a regular here. He's here a couple of times a year. Picks up comic boxes to store the stuff in. He's a nice guy, a really nice guy. When he came to the store — there aren't a lot of people who pay attention to people in the store — but when he came in the store, he gave plotlines that he knew about, he autographed copies of a few books, he was really nice. You really appreciate a guy like that. I particularly make a point out of not pointing out anybody, even if I know they're here, if they don't want to be known. But Joe spoke right up when the kids were talking about what was going to happen. I mean, it was FF. One day he really got mobbed, just about twenty to forty people before he was done, signing copies of books, and talking to him. All he did was come in to buy boxes. He might have been here half an hour. Well, it wasn't all at once. They came in one after another.

MITCH: *Do you have any thoughts of expanding the store?*

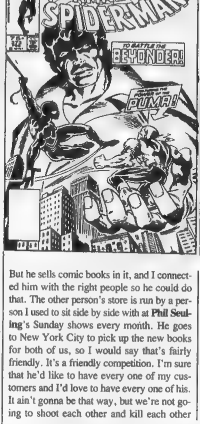
BRUCE: I'd love to expand, but it takes a lot of money, and you don't make a lot of money selling comics. Or at least I don't.

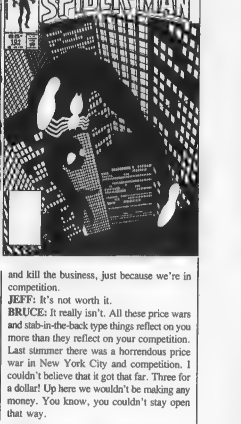
MITCH: *The business warrants it?*

BRUCE: Definitely, the business warrants it. I could expand by moving someplace else, but what I want to do is really be financially secure in what I'm doing before I make an expansion. I'm not going to go out on a limb to make an expansion when I'm doing fine here. There definitely will be an expansion. I mean, this business is what I'm going to be doing for the next ten years, at least.

MITCH: *Are you on a friendly basis with the competition stores in the area?*

BRUCE: Yeah! Definitely. Well, there are a couple of people who consider me their enemy, and they're out of business. They never had good business sense. But one of the guys was a former customer of mine. In fact, he probably built his entire collection through me. He runs a gold and silver store.





But he sells comic books in it, and I connected him with the right people so he could do that. The other person's store is run by a person I used to sit side by side with at **Phil Seuling**'s Sunday shows every month. He goes to New York City to pick up the new books for both of us, so I would say that's fairly friendly. It's a friendly competition. I'm sure that he'd like to have every one of my customers and I'd love to have every one of his. It ain't gonna be that way, but we're not going to shoot each other and kill each other and kill the business, just because we're in competition.

JEFF: It's not worth it.

BRUCE: It really isn't. All these price wars and stab-in-the-back type things reflect on you more than they reflect on your competition. Last summer there was a horrendous price war in New York City and competition. I couldn't believe that it got that far. Three for a dollar! Up here we wouldn't be making any money. You know, you couldn't stay open that way.

Above and top: Too many Spider-Man titles? Bruce thinks so.

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"The artist and writer sell the comic."

Bruce liked THRILLER.

But, by the same token, there are a lot of things that we can do that they can't. When you have a hundred good customers, and you know them all, you can afford a lot of service that you can't afford to give a thousand customers that you just get in off the street. You can do a lot of things with a small store that you can't do with a big store, especially with back issue prices. We've got 50% off anything before 1980 as a permanent policy.

MITCH: *Fifty percent of GUIDE?*

BRUCE: Yes. Or 50% off the price marked. You go to the box labelled THOR and there are items marked 1981 that I haven't sold. You go in there and there's a JOURNEY INTC MYSTERY that says three or four bucks on it, in good condition. It might be an eight buck book now, but since it says three bucks on it, you get it for a buck fifty. So that gives you a lot, a quarter of the price.

MITCH: *So how do you see the retail comic book business doing in the future?*

BRUCE: It really all depends upon the comic-book industry. The people that make the product. It has nothing to do with us. They've got to start getting the prodlct out on time. They've got to begin to have a better understanding of what sells and what doesn't. For every success there's five failures, and the failures come from just not paying attention to what the comic-book buyer is saying.

MITCH: *Could you give some examples?*

BRUCE: Let's see. I have a feeling about SECRET WARS II, that it's just not going to be a success. Okay? I have a feeling it's not going to be a success because SECRET WARS I was probably one of the worst comics I have read. And a lot of fans that have been buying it say there's no denying that. Nine hundred thousand is great numbers, and the numbers I saw sell on it are better than anything I've sold before in this store. But out of the 200 or 300 people who bought the book, I would say more than half said that they will nevér get involved with a series like that again, that they'll know better. Which means they bought the first three issues and decided to buy it all the way through. But the disappointment was so high — I see SECRET WARS II having a tough time having the same success as SECRET WARS I. Now, maybe Marvel will say, it'll do half that and we're still in good shape — but each time they put out a book like that and they lose the confidence of the buyer a little bit more, no matter how much money they make on it, they're winning the battle but losing the war! They do that with a lot of books.

A long-time comic-book collector, a guy I'd say spends between $40 and $50 a week in here, he buys everything, *everything* that's coming out. To digress a second — we're going to a system in the store now where we're offering subscription services for customers. He was aking about it, and we're giving 10% off, if pre-paid, okay? He wanted to check out his list — we have a service here called the reserve service, where I put aside books for each customer, for cover price if they can't make it until, say, two months, three months down the road. For example, if they had gotten THOR #337, which was $3 to $5 in a lot of places, three weeks after it came out — well, if they weren't here for three months, they could still come in and pick that book up for cover price, as long as they had it put away. As long as it was on their list.

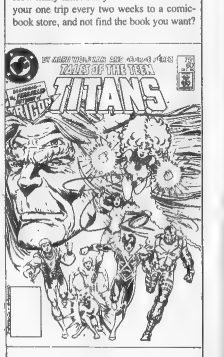
MITCH: *Does it kill you?*

BRUCE: It doesn't kill you because in the long run that guy's going to come back every three months and pick up $30 worth of books. The thing that would kill me is if I missed that book, if I didn't put it in their bag. It still would be cover price, even though I had to go out and buy that for $7. That's happened a couple of times. But that's just part of the service. As long as they buy everything in their bag, I owe them everything that they said they wanted at cover price. To get back to the subscription service that we're offering at a 10% discount, prepaid, it's the same service as the reserve service. And this guy, who has a fairly extensive list, as I said, is thinking of cancelling SPIDER-MAN just because there's too many of them. I mean, just because he's been overburdened by SPIDER-MAN. First, you got three different writers on three different books, and maybe the plotlines intertwine a little bit, but they don't intertwine a lot. He's thinking of quitting SPIDER-MAN. I would say that's a poor job, a poor job of putting out a comic book. And he's going to trim his list in a lot of other places, he said, even though he's getting 10% off of the top.

A lot of times, both Marvel and DC are late. How many times can you tell somebody who comes in here for TEEN TITANS, that it'll be next week? You know, pretty soon they lose faith in me. They don't lose faith in DC, they lose faith in me. It's my fault that that book's not out. I mean, I got the flak for CAMELOT 3000. DC didn't get the flak. They might have got a few letters. But I got the personal flak. People would think, "Well, he's just not getting them." I mean, you deal with comic-book dealers long enough and you know there are dealers who say that they can do things that they can't do. You take the flak for those dealers who say they can do things that they can't. If DC isn't doing what they're supposed to do, people'll go somewhere else looking for that book, saying, "My guy doesn't have it, and I don't know if he's telling me the truth."

MITCH: *They won't see it at that other store.*

BRUCE: True. And finally they may think it's not out. But some people will say, "Well, he's just not trying," and not come back. How many times can you drive 25 miles for your one trip every two weeks to a comic-book store, and not find the book you want?



TEEN TITANS was hurt by delays.

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"GRIMJACK is the best selling independent."

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MITCH: *What are your best-selling independents?*

BRUCE: I guess GRIMJACK's the best-selling independent I've got. My customers turned me on to it, because I'd stopped reading STARSLAYER when **Ostrander** first started writing it. He didn't have a grip on the character. He admitted as much in the letter columns. And so I stopped reading it after the first or second book that he wrote. So I missed the beginning of GRIMJACK, which was in the fourth book that he wrote. My customers kept wanting me to read it, and not being #1 or a new book, I don't usually pick up back issues. So I didn't read GRIMJACK until somewhere around STARSLAYER #16. After reading the whole thing together — the Vampire story which was real interesting, and very grim, and the teddy bear story which was such a contrast, and really one of the most fun stories I've read all year last year — I got behind it incredibly, just passing the word out to everyone. Check this out!

Because I'm honest about what comics I like, I can usually get someone to try a comic, try a first read. I sell a lot of comic books that way.

MITCH: *Which are some of your favorite independents?*

BRUCE: COYOTE, when it was good, the first four or five issues. I think that has a lot to do with how much I like **Englehart's** writing, and I really sold the book. People who started reading it, saw what I saw in it, but it took so long for them to find a new artist. Now he's had him in outer space or something, which I don't know how he did it and I didn't really care any more, so the book isn't selling as well as it was.

And THRILLER, when it was out, sold right in there, too. But after people read #8 and #9, I couldn't force people to read #11 and #12. It was unbelievable. By trying to save the book, the editor completely changed the whole focus of it, and so everybody who bought #1 through #8 didn't want to read the next four books. And so, if he picked up a bunch of new customers, he lost all his old ones. He lost everybody he had originally, just to find somebody new. It's no wonder the book failed.

We sold a lot of NATHANIEL DUSKs. But, right now, no independent books sell as well as regular comic-rack books. You've got people who have bought them forever and ever and they keep buying them. They can't let them get away. I guess most of what's mainline I've read every once in awhile. I wish there were rules for a guy taking over a character. There's so many flaws in the changeover of talent. There should be a concept of the character and you have to work within those bounds. Marvel put out — what

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"Joe Sinnott is a regular here."

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was that — THE MARVEL UNIVERSE, and then they put out SECRET WARS. I mean, guys did things in SECRET WARS what weren't within the bounds of what they should have been able to do.

JEFF: You mean like Captain America reconstructng his shield?

MITCH: *By sheer will!*

BRUCE: By sheer will! Yeah, that kind of thing. I mean, so that's not even a guideline. Maybe I'm misinterpreting it, but take, for instance, when DAREDEVIL was being written by **Miller**. Daredevil was an extension of Matt Murdock. Daredevil brought the criminals to the law, and Matt Murdock tried them, according to the law. Okay? Daredevil was *never* a vigilante character. He never went out for revenge, he always brought the characters to the law, right up to where they got tried. He was like an extension of the police force, and that's the way **Miller** had him in the book. A new writer takes over, two issues later Daredevil's got a vigilante side, he's working against Matt Murdock all of a sudden. Well, he's never gone for revenge! He's never brought justice to the streets! He's always brought them to the law! I mean, **Miller's** character was highly successful. Is it any wonder that I can't sell half of what I could now, than when **Miller** wrote it?

I listen to people as they come in and tell me about comics. I think that's what publishers *don't* do. I mean, you can read **T.M. Maple's** letters all you like, and *not* know what everybody in the world thinks about comics — you know what **T.M. Maple** thinks about them. The letters don't have a whole lot to do with it. I mean, I wouldn't know what to order if I didn't listen to what people came in and said they liked. And that's a whole problem right now with publishing comics. that they don't know what sells. It's too hit or miss. Before I knew who was drawing KITTY AND WOLVERINE, people had heard about it and were excited about it. As soon as they found out who was drawing it, the interest went down a hundredfold. If you're going to do special books like that, why don't you put special people on it? And I have nothing against — who was it, **Al Milgrom**? In fact, I first saw **Milgrom** in the 1970s, when I was a comic-book collector, at a convention, and he was all excited about FIRESTORM and STEEL. And it was contagious. He was such a friendly guy, such a great guy, who was really into comic books, and it was contagious. And he had produced two fun books that he wasn't allowed to do anything with.

Mike Gold was involved in that, too. At the time, Mike was the publicity director for DC, and both of those people were a heck of a lot of fun to be around at comic conventions. But **Al Milgrom's** not a fan favorite and doesn't have the talent of ten or fifteen people they could have used. I think that's disappointing when they don't try to find the best people to do the book, and think that because it's KITTY PRIDE AND WOLVERINE we're going to sell it anyway. But when you're having a special event, you should get the best person for that book. There should be money enough to make **Mike Golden** work in the business still. There should be money enough somewhere, because I know I can sell **Mike Golden** books. So it's got to be worth extra money to them to sell it. I mean, it's not just the gimmick that sells the book. The artist and the writer sell the book.

Another problem is when they advertise an artist's name on a book and he doesn't show up. That kills it. Why is he not showing up? Because he's got something he can make more money at that should be a priority. You can't blame his priorities. You just can't blame him. By the same token, instead of selling fifty copies of a book, I could sell 150. Just a name artist, alone, will make people try a book. Funny thing is, another one's name is **Sienkiewicz** — his NEW MUTANTS is selling better now than it ever did. Whoever the artist was on NEW MUTANTS, the book sold well, but it sells better with **Sienkiewicz.**

MITCH: *A lot better?*

BRUCE: A lot better. About 30% to 40% better. But I've had regulars who have quit the book because they don't like his artwork. And they're comic-book fans They're real serious comic-book fans, but it's just a mat-

"I could sell CAPTAIN AMERICA every day if Al Milgrom did it."

"Who's comparing comics to Shakespeare?"

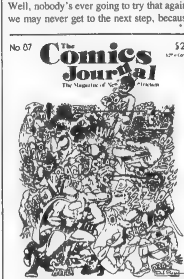
ter of taste. But more people are interested in something new than the people who aren't, who'd rather see the regular balloons and the regular panels. More people are interested in something new. Like with **Trevor Von Eeden**, and the THRILLER book — everybody wanted to participate. I mean, that comic you participated in. Storywise and artwise. It was just something very, very special in THRILLER. And there's a lot of people who would like to participate, given a chance.

By the same token, you're going to have straight comic-book readers all the time — they are happy to pick up straight comic-book art. Personally, I love **Jose Garcia Lopez** and **Don Heck** — they're two of my favorite comic-book artists. You probably can't find twenty young fans that even know their names, much less their artwork. And they probably wouldn't go out of their way to buy their books, but I'm sure glad to have them still around. But they won't sell books. I can't sell books with those names. And I'd rather not see them do special projects. I'd rather see **Don Heck**'s work every day on JUSTICE LEAGUE, so that the book stays consistent, and people who pick up that book know what they're getting. 'Cause I could sell an everyday book, an every month book like that, but on a special series, I need something special to sell that book. I could sell CAPTAIN AMERICA every day if **Al Milgrom** did it. Because people pick up CAPTAIN AMERICA and know that **Al Milgrom**'s there, know what his artwork looks like, want to read CAPTAIN AMERICA, whatever.

But if I have something like ICEMAN come in, and I have a **John Romita, Jr.** draw it, I'm not going to sell the book. In spite of the fact that Iceman's a good enough character to sell the book on his own. I'm not going to sell that book. It just won't happen. I have a hard time selling some books from some writers. **Romita**'s work on IRON MAN was great, you know. It was really a lot of fun work. And his work on X-MEN, although erratic — some of the books have been real good books.

Another thing is, these people who call themselves comic reviewers, they jump on a book before it's out! Bad reviews for NATHANIEL DUSK #1 before they've read #4 is really dumb. And all the reviews that came out on THRILLER #1 and #2, before they'd even gotten to the end of the story, are ridiculous! I mean, you don't review a movie from seeing the first ten minutes. So why review a comic book by reading the first chapter? All these people that scream for something new and something innovative — the first time something new or something innovative comes along, they go, "Boy, I

sure loved the days of RICHIE RICH. What happened to the straight lines in ARCHIE?" You know, the same people who say comic books should reach, stretch out? Well, how did that process start without experimentation? And if those experiments come out a little off, there's at least something good to them. I mean, the movement in **Trevor Von Eeden's** panels in THRILLER was as good as anything — that was a new step. That was a step forward! Maybe the story wasn't cohesive, maybe the artwork was at times not understandable, but for those who understood some of those things — that movement, using the panels in a new way to tell the story — it was something new. It was a step ahead. Well, nobody's ever going to try that again, we may never get to the next step, because



"I wish I had a nickle for every time Dostoevsky has been mentioned in THE COMICS JOURNAL."

that book was panned by everybody in the business, and it was cancelled by its own editor, just about. It was stomped on by its own editor!

You're never going to go from comic books to what these people are talking about. There's got to be steps in between, and they're not allowing them to happen. I just don't think they're allowing them to happen. They're killing them before they've had any chance. It's horrible to see these guys day after day in these fan magazines write, "When are we going to get something new? When are we going to get something innovative?" Every time something new comes along, they say, "What happened to the old comic books?" The same guys say those two lines — constantly! "Whatever happened to those old great all-star stories?" "**Infantino**'s new stuff is not as good as his old stuff." "**Kubert**'s new stuff is not as good as his old stuff." Well, you're never going to advance if you're living in the past, hoping for the future. They're killing off the books as much as anybody! There's no way in the world we're ever going to get to the point where, like Europe, comics are reviewed like movies — until the people who are doing the reviewing at the comic-book level start reviewing comic books compared to comic books, and not to **Dostoevsky**. I wish I had a nickel for every time **Dostoevsky** has been mentioned in the COMICS JOURNAL. Or **Shakespeare**, or some ridiculous thing like that! Who's comparing comic books to **Shakespeare**? And if you want to read **Shakespeare**, or you've ever felt like reading **Shakespeare**, how many times have you turned to a comic book and picked it up? *(Laughter.)* People have got to start being realistic. If you want something new, then you've got to accept something new!

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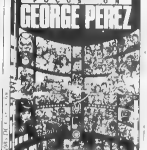

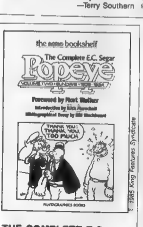
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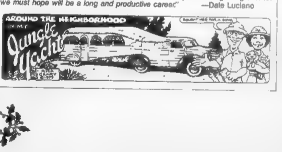

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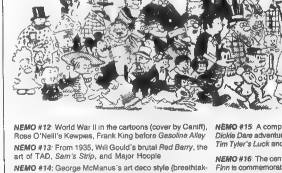

NEMO #12 World War II in the cartoons (cover by Caniff), Rose O'Neill's Kewpies, Frank King before *Gasoline Alley*

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NEMO #16: The centennial of the publication of *Huckleberry Finn* is commemorated with a reprinting of the Twain estate-authorized comic strip by DWIG, and an article by the illustrator of the first edition.

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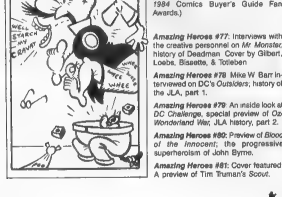

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Amazing Heroes #79 An inside look at *DC Challenge*, special preview of *Oz/ Wonderland War*, JLA history, part 2.

Amazing Heroes #80: Preview of *Blood of the Innocent*; the progressive superheroism of John Byrne.

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Christmas Catalogue

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

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WON'T SACRIFICE PRINCIPLES

Dear Dave,

I guess some people just cannot take a joke. The latest COMICS INTEVIEW contained one (relatively) unprovoked attack against me regarding my letter in COMICS INTERVIEW #19.

Sure, I admit that I was using the letters pages of COMICS INTERVIEW to make sport of the whole She-Hulk controversy, but I was only doing it for laughs. Personally, I thought that my letter was pretty funny. Evidently, others do not feel that way.

All I was trying to do was help my fellow fans by showing them how to treat a joke like a joke. And this is the gratitude I get! You'd think they would appreciate all the work I put in for them over the minutes, but noo-oo-oo! Instead I get attacked by **Barry Dutter** and have my mailbox stuffed with unsolicited propositions. Everyone seems to have missed the point of my previous letter and cannot see that it was for the good of COMICS INTERVIEW's letters pages and in the long run could only benefit society.

I have read, in COMICS INTERVIEW, stuff from many an interesting letter writer, such as **Steinberg, Maple,** and **Sacks** — and I expect to keep reading good things — but I will probably never read a coherent letter from **Barry Dutter.** When I wrote my previous letter I honestly didn't think it was about **Dutter**, but he responded, "I guess some people just cannot take a joke." Apparently he believes that giving a joke in response to a joke indicates a lack of sense of humor. But this is something that I refuse to believe. I will not sacrifice my principles.

Of course, we all know that the real reason **Dutter** started his personal vendetta against She-Hulk is because he wants to write for Marvel and believes that when they decide to kill her they'll let him do it. It seems that **Barry Dutter** has taken seriously my postulation that he loves that character, particularly the Marvel response section, as presented in issue #19. It's frustrating to think he really missed the point, but go try to tell some people!

No, Barry — I do believe you protest too much. I'd much rather see Thundra return whether she replaces anybody or not. Tell **Dave Mackey** I quite enjoyed his latest letter to COMICS INTERVIEW — not to worry. And finally, tell **Amy Sacks** that Barry is sorry. Since he feels that he can represent me then he won't mind if I represent him! Yes, I'm serious, in the name of **Barry Dutter** and for all the cruel things he has said about her — I hereby extend to **Amy Sacks** *a formal apology!*

Darrel L. Boatz
Dittoville, USA

PS: If any COMICS INTERVIEW readers are experiencing a certain sense of *deja vu* — I refer you to a certain letter in issue #23.

NOW, THE SHE-HULK ALONE KEEPS THE BRIDGE ALOFT-- BY DINT OF SHEER STRENGTH, YET...
I CAN'T KEEP THIS UP.. FOREVER! MY GRIP... IT'S SLIPPING...
...SLIPPING...

The savage She-Hulk, focus of a controversy that began as a joke. Drawn by Mike Vosburg and Chic Stone.

SODARO: AN IMPROPER FIXATION WITH SINGER?

Dear Dave,

People connected with the comic book field quickly learn to be thick skinned. Few industries are as gossip ridden or as back biting as ours. The letter you chose to run by **Bob Sodaro** (issue #25) was written for the single purpose of attempting to hurt my feelings or to embarass me. That **Sodaro** has a peculiar fixation with me and refuses to leave me alone is no secret. Anyone who knows me knows his letter fails to contain a single shred of truth to it.

If I were the type of person **Sodaro** portrays me to be, I would take advantage of the fact that each of the issues of each of the comic book titles I publish reaches hundreds of thousands of readers, and I would publicly ridicule and insult **Sodaro** the same way he attempted to do so in COMICS INTERVIEW. That is not my style. A simple response in "The Last Word" will suffice.

Sodaro wastes a full column inch of your magazine attempting to prove that I am incapable of telling the truth by citing the fact

that I didn't reveal my true age in the interview. Does anyone really care? In point of fact, I didn't give a false age. I simply declined to offer it. The reason? I have a running joke with my friends about my true age and didn't want them to read it in print. (Boy, aren't I sleazy and deceitful!) I don't know why **Sodaro** says "For the record, **Singer** is 29 years old." For the record, that is not my correct age. (And this was **Sodaro's** major revelation! Sad, isn't it?)

Sodaro devoted even more effort to trying to discover why one girl in a photo was identified only as "a friend." The photo in question is at least four years old, and I don't remember the woman's name. (The readers owe **Sodaro** a debt of thanks. If it wasn't for his hard hitting letter, they would never have learned this bizarre but true fact!)

Finally, **Sodaro** claims that the photo of me with **Cheryl Rixon** is a fraud; that I supplied her as "window dressing." His proof? "Shortly after the issue hit the stands, I received no less than three phone calls from former **Singer** employees informing me I will ignore the question of why would those "three former **Singer** employees" think to call **Sodaro** with their revelations, rather than calling COMICS INTERVIEW. I will ignore the fact that none of my employees (former or current) knew me four years ago when the picture was taken (and therefore have no way of knowing whether or not the photo is real). In fact, I plan to ignore the entire idiotic letter. (It is a shame DAK didn't choose to do so as well.)

One thing I cannot ignore is **Sodaro's** near-libelous statement that I transferred assets from Deluxe Comics to Lodestone Publishing. Several months ago, Lodestone purchased furniture from Deluxe Comics for several hundred dollars. A bill of sale exists. Thus, technically, assets have been transferred. **Sodaro's** phrasing makes it sound as if something improper was done. The only thing improper is his fixation with me. If he wishes to continue to pursue this fixation, I wish he would keep his failed attempts private, and not soil your readers as he has.

And Dave, a personal thought to you: You once told me your objective with COMICS INTERVIEW was to publish a fanzine that extolled the joys of working in, and reading, comics. You didn't print gossipy news or interviews in which one person attacked another. So why did you print **Sodaro's** smear letter? It served no purpose other than to allow him to call me a liar a half dozen different ways. I expected better of COMICS INTERVIEW.

In closing, I wish to thank you for printing the photo of Lisa and me (with **Senator D'Amato**). It is one of my favorites. (PS: to **Sodaro**: If you are still trying to figure out my age, here's a hint: I began dating Lisa two years after I last saw **Cheryl Rixon**.)

David M. Singer
Deluxe Comics — Suite 666
434 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10011

First and foremost, Dave, COMICS INTERVIEW is a magazine of opinion — the opinions of the individuals being interviewed, or of those writing letters in response. You're right, my own preference is to produce a magazine that spotlights the joys of comics rather than the dirt. But I regard each interview as a chance for that person to have his or her own say, without being forced to comply with my views. In short, whether I agree with them or not, I respect the right of each person to express his or her own opinion. That applied to your interview in issue #20, Dave, and to Bob Sodaro's response in issue #25.

— DAK

COMIC BOOK HEROES NEED HELP

Dear David,

Here's a suggestion for COMICS INTERVIEW.

As you may have heard by now, we are the authors of THE COMIC BOOK HEROES, a critical history of the medium from the 1950s to the present. The book will

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S

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be hitting the stands any day now, and we'd very much like to see it plugged in your magazine. Apart from giving the book some much-needed publicity, this would also serve another purpose, one which we consider very important.

The prevalent concern today among most everyone involved in comics, creator and serious fan alike, is that the field reach a much wider audience. We feel our book, the first of its kind when one considers that all previous histories have dealt solely with the "Golden Age," could make great strides in this direction. This book will be marketed primarily in bookstores, rather than comic speciality shops, and that fact alone should make a considerable difference

Let's face it: Most, if not all, of the exhortations that comics reach a wider audience only see print in fanzines or in the comics themselves, where they are read solely by the people who already buy the damned things. Whether one loves our book or hates it, agrees or disagrees with our conclusions, its success on the marketplace could pave the way for more such publications until, hopefully, they will become widespread enough, and varied enough in content, that the public at large won't be able to help but take notice. Among our acquaintances alone, many people whom we've never been able to persuade to read a comic, are eagerly awaiting a look at our book. If enough comic fans buy it, perhaps all those friends and relatives out there who are never fully convinced that they should read that especially good issue of NEXUS or LOVE AND ROCKETS or SWAMP THING will finally receive that extra nudge necessary to help them make the plunge. And of course, the more comic fans who buy it, the longer the book will be on the shelves for non-fans to discover it.

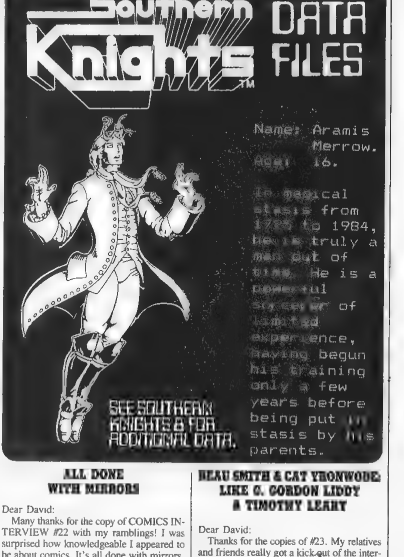
So how about it? Our publisher, Crown Publishers, is taking the standard half-assed approached to publicizing a book of this kind. And we need that extra push to get it noticed. The life span of most books is dismayingly brief, and we'd hate for ours to come and go unnoticed, especially when it could make such a difference in a field for which we have so much fondness and concern.

We'd be very open to an interview, if that suits your purposes, but even just an editorial mention would be very gratifying to us.

Gerard Jones
Will Jacobs
360 Guerrero Street #414
San Francisco, CA 94103

How's this, guys? As far as editorial mention — I managed to jockey the ad for your book onto the contents page of COMICS INTERVIEW #26 in place of the editorial, where it was most certain to be seen and noticed. I've heard good things about the book and like to do what I can to boost pro-comics projects such as yours. Good luck with the book!

— DAK


Southern Knights
DATA FILES
Name: Aramis Merrow.
Age: 16.
In medical stasis from 1785 to 1984, he is truly a man out of time. He is a powerful sorcerer of limited experience, having begun his training only a few years before being put in stasis by his parents.
SEE SOUTHERN KNIGHTS 6 FOR ADDITIONAL DATA.

ALL DONE WITH MIRRORS

Dear David:

Many thanks for the copy of COMICS INTERVIEW #22 with my ramblings! I was surprised how knowledgeable I appeared to be about comics. It's all done with mirrors, folks.

My list of horror milestones was scribbled down pretty quickly — I managed to omit **James Herbert's** THE FOG, for instance, and include **Lovecraft's** letters purely because I find them, and the man as well as his fiction, so fascinating. I would also strongly recommend **T.E.D. Klein's** recent novel THE CEREMONIES.

The other omission I very much regret is the **Alan Moore** SWAMP THING. I hadn't read any issues when the interview was done. Well, just now it's the only comic I collect obsessively. I think it's remarkable, both the writing and the art — immensely and movingly imaginative.

My working titles tend to change, so may I take the opportunity to point out that the book I referred to as FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES was published as OBSESSION, and BLIND DARK is likely to see print as THE HUNGRY MOON?

Keep up the good work!

Ramsey Campbell
Merseyside, England

BEAU SMITH & CAT YRONWODE: LIKE G. GORDON LIDDY & TIMOTHY LEARY

Dear David:

Thanks for the copies of #23. My relatives and friends really got a kick out of the interview with me.

I really enjoyed the issue. **Phil Foglio** had some interesting things to say. His stuff is the kinda stuff that I don't buy or care for, but he did have some very good points. I guess that's what I like most about your magazine — even if you don't care much for the product that the person puts out, you can still enjoy an interview with the person. It goes to show that it's the people that make the book interesting.

Cat Yronwode and I come from opposite ends of the comic-book spectrum and it seems opposite wings of the Eagle. But just like I said in my interview, it doesn't matter what kind of person you are, comics collecting is a common bond. For that matter, hobbies in general. It was a nice idea having Cat's interview and mine back to back. Was this done on purpose? It was kinda like having **G. Gordon Liddy** and **Timothy Leary** on the same talk show at the same time.

Stephen Scott Beau Smith
711 6th Street W
Huntington, WV 25704

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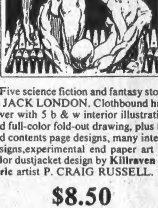

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COMICS INTERVIEW BACK ISSUES ARE COLLECTORS ITEMS!

Dear DAK:

The **John Byrne** interview in COMICS INTERVIEW #25 was a little bit disappointing. I was expecting a discussion about **Byrne**'s entire career in comics — something that might in future years be referred to as The **Byrne** Document — instead of just focusing on his FANTASTIC FOUR work. I love the FANTASTIC FOUR, so I didn't mind reading **Byrne**'s comments on The World's Greatest Comics Magazine. It's just that what I expected wasn't what I got. But what I *did* get, I enjoyed.

(It's amazing to realize that **John Byrne** has been doing the FANTASTIC FOUR for *four years* already! I don't live and die on every X-Men appearance, nor do I write **Jim Shooter** every day asking why **Byrne** was taken off X-MEN, but I still think of FANTASTIC FOUR as a book **Byrne** only recently took over. Who says this isn't the Marvel Age of Flying Time?)

I don't mean to brush off the **Byrne** interview, but I was just as impressed with the new, improved back-issue ad in the latest issue. I'd been meaning to write and comment about the poor quality of the cover reproductions in the back-issue ads. In your editorial in #24, you say, "It's not the popular comics of today . . . which will be tomorrow's collector's items. I believe . . . magazines such as COMICS INTERVIEW stand a far better chance of becoming the truly sought-after and valuable collector's items." I agree with you, but not because of lower print runs (which is why you think these magazines could be worth big bucks). In the future, magazines such as yours will provide the fan of the future with a glimpse of comics fandom circa 1985 in an on-the-spot-reporting manner that a retrospective article written twenty years later cannot. Magazines such as COMICS INTERVIEW, THE COMICS JOURNAL and THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE will be looked upon as valuable reference works and original source material for the comic art historians of tomorrow. With this in mind, being able to see actual photos of the COMICS INTERVIEW covers will help give an idea of what the big stories were in the world of comics from 1982 (when #1 came out) to 1985.

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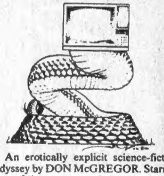

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NEXT ISSUE: What do ELRIC and MR. MONSTER have in common? Artist MIKE GILBERT, who may be the next King of the Crossovers! (Wouldja believe MR. MONSTER vs. SWAMP THING?) Part Two of a walk on the wild side with WILLIAM WOOLFOLK--who rips the lid off the Golden Age--this one's hot, folks! Plus: The TEEN TITANS and social issues--lots more! Be here or be sorry. Look for the colorful Elric/Mr. Monster cover on COMICS INTERVIEW # 29...

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